



THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

35¢

MAY

EVERY STORY
in this issue **NEW**

TIME PATROL

A NOVELET BY

Poul Anderson



J. T. McINTOSH

RICHARD MATHESON

MIRIAM ALLEN DeFORD & ANTHONY BOUCHER

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 8, No. 5

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Anthony Boucher, EDITOR

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Time Patrol

by POUL ANDERSON

MEN WANTED: 21-40, PREF. single, mil. or tech. exp., good physique, for high-pay work with foreign travel. Engineering Studies Co., 305 E. 45, 9-12 & 2-6.

"The work is, you understand, somewhat unusual," said Mr. Gordon. "And confidential. I trust you can keep a secret?"

"Normally," said Manse Everard. "Depends on what the secret is, of course."

Mr. Gordon smiled. It was a curious smile, a closed curve of his lips which was not quite like any Everard had seen before. He spoke easy colloquial General American, and wore an undistinguished business suit, but there was a foreignness over him which was more than dark complexion, beardless cheeks, and the incongruity of Mon-

golian eyes above a thin Caucasian nose. It was hard to place.

"We're not spies, if that's what you're thinking," he said.

Everard grinned. "Sorry. Please don't think I've gone as hysterical as the rest of the country. I've never had access to confidential data anyway. But your ad mentioned overseas operations, and the way things are . . . I'd like to keep my passport, you understand."

He was a big man, with blocky shoulders and a slightly battered face under crew-cut brown hair. His papers lay before him: Army discharge, the record of work in several places as a mechanical engineer. Mr. Gordon had seemed barely to glance at them.

The office was ordinary, a desk and a couple of chairs, a filing

cabinet, and a door leading off in the rear. A window opened on the banging traffic of New York, six stories down.

"Independent spirit," said the man behind the desk. "I like that. So many of them come cringing in, as if they'd be grateful for a kick. Of course, with your background you aren't desperate yet. You can still get work, even in — ah, I believe the current term is a rolling readjustment."

"I was interested," said Everard. "I've worked abroad, as you can see, and would like to travel again. But frankly, I still don't have the faintest idea what your outfit does."

"We do a good many things," said Mr. Gordon. "Let me see . . . you've been in combat. France and Germany." Everard blinked; his papers had included a record of medals, but he'd sworn the man hadn't had time to read them. "Um . . . would you mind grasping those knobs on the arms of your chair? Thank you. Now, how do you react to physical danger?"

Everard bristled. "Look here —"

Mr. Gordon's eyes flicked to an instrument on his desk: it was merely a box with an indicator needle and a couple of dials. "Never mind. What are your views on internationalism?"

"Say, now —"

"Communism? Fascism? Women? Your personal ambitions? . . . That's all. You don't have to answer."

"What the devil is this, anyway?" snapped Everard.

"A bit of psychological testing. Forget it. I've no interest in your opinions except as they reflect basic emotional orientation." Mr. Gordon leaned back, making a bridge of his fingers. "Very promising so far. Now, here's the set-up. We're doing work which is, as I've told you, highly confidential. We . . . ah . . . we're planning to spring a surprise on our competitors." He chuckled. "Go ahead and report me to the FBI if you wish. We've already been investigated and have a clean bill of health. You'll find that we really do carry on worldwide financial and engineering operations. But there's another aspect of the job, and that's the one we want men for. I'll pay you one hundred dollars to go in the back room and take a set of tests. It'll last about three hours. If you don't pass, that's the end of it. If you do, we'll sign you on, tell you the facts, and start you training. Are you game?"

Everard hesitated. He had a feeling of being rushed. There was more to this enterprise than an office and one bland stranger. Still . . .

Decision. "I'll sign on *after* you've told me what it's all about."

"As you wish," shrugged Mr. Gordon. "Suit yourself. The tests will say whether you're going to or not, you know. We use some very advanced techniques."

That, at least, was entirely true. Everard knew a little something about modern psychology: encephalographs, association tests, the Minnesota profile. He did not recognize any of the hooded machines that hummed and blinked around him. The questions which the assistant — a white-skinned, completely hairless man of indeterminate age, with a heavy accent and no facial expression — fired at him seemed irrelevant to anything. And what was the metal cap he was supposed to wear on his head, into what did the wires from it lead?

He stole glances at the meter faces, but the letters and numerals were like nothing he had seen before. Not English, French, Russian, Greek, Chinese, anything belonging to 1954 A.D. Perhaps he was already beginning to realize the truth, even then.

A curious self-knowledge grew in him as the tests proceeded. Manson Emmert Everard, age 30, one-time lieutenant in the U. S. Army Engineers, design and production experience in America, Sweden, Arabia; still a bachelor, though with increasingly wistful thoughts about his married friends, no current girl, no close ties of any kind; a bit of a bibliophile, a dogged poker player, fondness for sailboats and horses and rifles, a camper and fisherman on his vacations . . . He had known it all, of course, but only as isolated shards of fact. It was peculiar, this sudden sensing of himself as an

integrated organism, this realization that each characteristic was a single inevitable facet of an overall pattern.

He came out exhausted and wringing wet. Mr. Gordon offered him a cigarette and swept eyes rapidly over a series of coded sheets which the assistant gave him. Now and then he muttered a phrase: "— Zeth-20 cortical . . . undifferentiated evaluation here . . . psychic reaction to antitoxin . . . weakness in central coordination . . ." He had slipped into an accent, a lilt and a treatment of vowels which were like nothing Everard had heard in a long experience of the ways in which the English language can be mangled.

It was half an hour before he looked up again. Everard was getting restless, faintly angry at this cavalier treatment, but interest had kept him sitting quietly. Mr. Gordon flashed improbably white teeth in a broad, satisfied grin. "Ah . . . at last. Do you know, I've had to reject twenty-four candidates already? But you'll do. You'll definitely do."

"Do for what?" Everard leaned forward, conscious of his pulse picking up.

"The Patrol. You're going to be a kind of policeman."

"Yeah? Where?"

"Everywhere. And everywhen. Brace yourself, this is going to be a shock.

"You see, our company, while

legitimate enough, is only a front and a source of funds. Our real business is patrolling time."

II

The Academy was in the American West. It was also in the Oligocene period, a warm age of forests and grasslands when man's ratty ancestors scuttled away from the tread of giant mammals. It had been built a thousand years ago; it would be maintained for half a million — long enough to graduate as many as the Time Patrol would require — and then be carefully demolished so that no trace would remain. Later the glaciers would come, and there would be men, and in the year 19352 A.D. (the 7841st year of the Morennian Triumph) these men would find a way to travel through time and return to the Oligocene to establish the Academy.

It was a complex of long low buildings, smooth curves and shifting colors, spreading over a greensward between enormous ancient trees. Beyond it, hills and woods rolled off to a great brown river, and at night you could sometimes hear the bellowing of titanotheres or the distant squall of a sabertooth.

Everard stepped out of the time shuttle — a big, featureless metal box — with a dryness in his throat. It felt like his first day in the Army, twelve years ago — or fifteen to twenty million years in the future, if you preferred. Lonely, and helpless, and wishing desperately for

some honorable way to go home. It was a small comfort to see the other shuttles, discharging a total of fifty-odd young men and women. The recruits moved slowly together, forming an awkward clump. They didn't speak at first, but stood staring at each other. Everard recognized a Hoover collar and a bowler; the styles of dress and hairdo moved up through 1954 and on. Where was she from, the girl with the iridescent close-fitting culottes and the green lipstick and the fantastically waved yellow hair? No . . . when?

A man of about 25 happened to stand beside him — obviously British, from the threadbare tweeds and the long, thin face. He seemed to be hiding a truculent bitterness under his carefully mannered exterior. "Hell," said Everard. "Might as well get acquainted." He gave his name and origin.

"Charles Whitcomb, London, 1947," said the other shyly. "I was just demobbed — RAF — and this looked good. Now I wonder."

"It may be," said Everard, thinking of the salary. Fifteen thousand a year to start with! How did they figure years, though? Must be in terms of one's actual duration-sense.

A man strolled in their direction. He was a slender young fellow in a skin-tight gray uniform with a deep-blue cloak which seemed to twinkle, as if it had stars sewn in. His face was pleasant, smiling, and he spoke genially with a neutral accent: "Hello, there! Welcome to the

Academy. I take it you all know English?" Everard noticed a man in the shabby remnants of a German uniform, and a Hindu, and others who were probably from several foreign countries.

"We'll use English, then, till you've all learned Temporal." The man lounged easily, hands on his hips. "My name is Dard Kelm. I was born in — let me see — 9573 Christian reckoning, but I've made a specialty of your period. Which, by the way, extends from 1850 to 1975, though you're all from some in-between years. I'm your official wailing wall, if something goes wrong.

"This place is run along different lines from what you've probably been expecting. We don't turn out men en masse, so the elaborate discipline of a classroom or an army is not required. Each of you will have individual as well as general instruction. We don't need to punish failure in studies, because the preliminary tests have guaranteed there won't be any and made the chance of failure on the job small. Each of you has a high maturity rating in terms of your particular cultures. However, the variation in aptitudes means that if we're to develop each individual to the fullest, there must be personal guidance.

"There's little formality here beyond normal courtesy. You'll have chances for recreation as well as study. We never expect more of you than you can give. I might add

that the hunting and fishing are still pretty good even in this neighborhood, and if you fly just a few hundred miles they're fantastic.

"Now, if there aren't any questions, please follow me and I'll get you settled."

Dard Kelm demonstrated the gadgets in a typical room. They were the sort you would have expected by, say, 2000 A.D: unobtrusive furniture readily adjusted to a perfect fit, refresher cabinets, screens which could draw on a huge library of recorded sight and sound for entertainment. Nothing too advanced, as yet. Each cadet had his own room in the "dormitory" building; meals were in a central refectory, but arrangements could be made for private parties. Everard felt the tension easing within him.

A welcoming banquet was held. The courses were familiar, but the silent machines which rolled up to serve them were not. There was wine, beer, an ample supply of tobacco. Maybe something had been slipped into the food, for Everard felt as euphoric as the others. He ended up beating out boogie on a piano while half a dozen people made the air hideous with attempts at song.

Only Charles Whitcomb held back, sipping a moody glass over in a corner by himself. Dard Kelm was tactful and did not try to force him into joining.

Everard decided he was going to like it. But the work and the or-

ganization and the purpose were still shadows.

"Time travel was discovered at a period when the Chorite Heresyarchy was breaking up," said Kelm in the lecture hall. "You'll study the details later; for now, take my word that it was a turbulent age, when commercial and genetic rivalry was a tooth-and-claw matter between giant combines, anything went, and the various governments were pawns in a galactic game. The time effect was the byproduct of a search for a means of instantaneous transportation, which some of you will realize requires infinitely discontinuous functions for its mathematical description . . . as does travel into the past. I won't go into the theory of it — you'll get some of that in the physics classes — but merely state that it involves the concept of infinite-valued relationships in a continuum of $4N$ dimensions, where N is the total number of particles in the universe.

"Naturally, the group which discovered this, the Nine, were aware of the possibilities. Not only commercial — trading, mining, and other enterprises you can readily imagine — but the chance of striking a death-blow at their enemies. You see, time is variable; the past can be changed —"

"Question!" It was the girl from 1972, Elizabeth Gray, who was a rising young physicist in her own period.

"Yes?" said Kelm politely.

"I think you're describing a logically impossible situation. I'll grant the possibility of time travel, seeing that we're here, but an event cannot both *have* happened and *not* have happened. That's self-contradictory."

"Only if you insist on a logic which is not Aleph-sub-Aleph-valued," said Kelm. "What happens is like this: suppose I went back in time and prevented your father from meeting your mother. You would never have *been* born. That portion of universal history would read differently; it would always have been different, though I would retain memory of the 'original' state of affairs."

"Well, how about doing the same to yourself? Would you cease existing?"

"No. Because I would belong to the section of history prior to my own intervention. Let's apply it to you. If you went back to, I would guess, 1946, and worked to prevent your parents' marriage in 1947, you would still have existed in that year; you would not go out of existence just because you had influenced events. The same would apply even if you had only been in 1946 one microsecond before shooting the man who would otherwise have become your father."

"But then I'd exist without — without an origin!" she protested. "I'd have life, and memories, and . . . everything . . . though *nothing* had produced them."

Kelm shrugged. "What of it? You insist that the causal law, or strictly speaking the conservation-of-energy law, involves only continuous functions. Actually, discontinuity is entirely possible."

He laughed and leaned on the pulpit. "Of course, there are impossibilities," he said. "You could not be your own mother, for instance, because of sheer genetics. If you went back and married your former father, the children would be different, none of them you, because each would have only half your chromosomes."

Clearing his throat: "Let's not stray from the subject. You'll learn the details in other classes. I'm only giving you a general background. To continue: the Nine saw the possibility of going back in time and preventing their enemies from ever having gotten started, even from ever being born. But then the Daneelians appeared."

For the first time, his casual, half-humorous air dropped, and he stood there as a man very naked and alone in the presence of the unknowable. He spoke quietly: "The Daneelians are part of the future — our future, more than a million years ahead of me. Man has evolved into something . . . impossible to describe. You'll probably never meet a Daneelian. If you ever should, it will be . . . rather a shock. They aren't malignant — nor benevolent — they are as far beyond anything we can know or feel as we are be-

yond those insectivores who are going to be our ancestors. It isn't good to meet that sort of thing face to face.

"They were simply concerned with protecting their own existence. Time travel was old when they emerged, there had been uncountable opportunities for the foolish and the greedy and the mad to go back and turn history inside out. They did not wish to forbid the travel — it was part of the complex which had led to them — but they had to regulate it. The Nine were prevented from carrying out their schemes. And the Patrol was set up to police the time lanes.

"Your work will be mostly within your own eras, unless you graduate to unattached status. You will live, on the whole, ordinary lives, family and friends as usual; the secret part of those lives will have the satisfactions of good pay, protection, occasional vacations in some very interesting places, supremely worthwhile work. But you will always be on call. Sometimes you will help time travelers who have gotten into difficulties, one way or another. Sometimes you will work on missions, the apprehension of would-be political or military or economic conquistadors. Sometimes the Patrol will accept damage as done, and work instead to set up counteracting influences in later periods which will swing history back to the desired track.

"I wish all of you luck."

The first part of instruction was physical and psychological. Everard had never realized how his own life had crippled him, in body and mind; he was only half the man he could be. It came hard, but in the end it was joy to feel the utterly controlled power of muscles, the emotions which had grown deeper for being disciplined, the swiftness and precision of conscious thought.

Somewhere along the line, he was thoroughly conditioned against revealing anything about the Patrol, even hinting at its existence, to any unauthorized person. It was simply impossible for him to do so, under any influence, as impossible as jumping to the moon. He also learned the ins and outs of his 20th-century public *persona*.

Temporal, the artificial language with which Patrolmen from all ages could communicate without being understood by strangers, was a miracle of logically organized expressiveness.

He thought he knew something about combat, but he had to learn the tricks and the weapons of fifty thousand years, all the way from a Bronze Age rapier to a cyclic blast which could annihilate a continent. Returned to his own era, he would be given a limited arsenal, but he might be called into other periods and overt anachronism was rarely permissible.

There was the study of history, science, arts and philosophies, fine details of dialect and mannerism.

These last were only for the 1850-1975 period; if he had occasion to go elsewhere he would pick up special instruction from a hypnotic conditioner. It was such machines that made it possible to complete his training in three months.

He learned the organization of the Patrol. Up "ahead" lay the dark mystery which was Daneelian civilization, but there was little direct contact with it. The Patrol was set up in semi-military fashion, with ranks though without special formalities. History was divided into milieus, with a head office located in a major city for a selected twenty-year period (disguised by some ostensible activity such as commerce) and various branch offices. For his time, there were three milieus: the Western world, headquarters in London; Russia, in Moscow; Asia, in Peiping; each in the easy-going years 1890-1910, when concealment was less difficult than in later decades, which were staffed by smaller offices such as Gordon's. An ordinary attached agent lived as usual in his own time, often with an authentic job. Communication between years was by tiny robot shuttles or by courier, with automatic shunts to keep such messages from piling up at once.

The entire organization was so vast that he could not really appreciate the fact. He had entered something new and exciting, that was all he truly grasped with all layers of consciousness . . . as yet.

He found his instructors friendly, ready to gab. The grizzled veteran who taught him to handle space-ships had fought in the Martian war of 3890. "You boys catch on fairly quick," he said. "It's really hell, though, teaching pre-industrial people. We've quit even trying to give them more than the rudiments. Had a Roman here once — Caesar's time — fairly bright boy, too, but he never got it through his head that a machine can't be treated like a horse. As for those Babylonians — time travel just wasn't in their world-picture. We had to give them a battle-of-the-gods routine."

"What routine are you giving us?" asked Whitcomb.

The spaceman regarded him narrowly. "The truth," he said at last. "As much of it as you can take."

"How did you get into this job?"

"Oh . . . I was shot up off Jupiter. Not much left of me. They picked me up, built me a new body — since none of my people were alive, and I was presumed dead, there didn't seem much point in going back home. No fun living under the Guidance Corps. So I took this position here. Good company, easy living, and furloughs in a lot of eras." The spaceman grinned. "Wait till you've been to the decadent stage of the Third Matriarchy! You don't know what fun is."

Everard said nothing. He was too captured by the spectacle of Earth, rolling enormous against the stars.

He made friends with his fellow cadets. They were a congenial bunch — naturally, with the same type being picked for Patrollers, bold and intelligent minds. There were a couple of romances. Everard remembered *Portrait of Jenny*, but these were not so doomed. Marriage was entirely possible, with the couple picking some year in which to set up housekeeping. He himself liked the girls, but kept his head.

Oddly, it was the silent and morose Whitcomb with whom he struck up the closest friendship. There was something appealing about the Englishman — he was so cultured, such a thoroughly good fellow, and still somehow lost.

They were out riding one day — horses whose remote ancestors scampered before their gigantic descendants. Everard had a rifle, in the hope of bagging a shovel-tusker he had seen. Both wore Academy uniform, light grays which were cool and silky under the hot yellow sun.

"I wonder we're allowed to hunt," remarked the American. "Suppose I shoot a sabertooth — in Asia, I suppose — which was originally slated to eat one of those pre-human insectivores. Won't that change the whole future?"

"No," said Whitcomb. He had progressed faster in studying the theory of time travel. "You see, it's rather as if the continuum were a mesh of tough rubber bands. It isn't easy to distort it, the tendency is always for it to snap back to its,

uh, 'former' shape. One individual insectivore doesn't matter, it's the total genetic pool of their species which led to man.

"Likewise, if I killed a sheep in the Middle Ages, I wouldn't wipe out all its later descendants, maybe all the sheep there were by 1940. Rather, those would still be there, unchanged down to their very genes in spite of a different ancestry — because over so long a period of time, all the sheep, or men, are descendants of *all* the earlier sheep or men. Compensation, don't you see; somewhere along the line, some other ancestor supplies the genes you thought you had eliminated.

"In the same way . . . oh, suppose I went back and prevented Booth from killing Lincoln. Unless I took very elaborate precautions, it would probably happen that someone else did the shooting and Booth got blamed anyway.

"That resilience of time is the reason travel is permitted at all. If you want to change things, you have to go about it just right and work very hard, usually."

His mouth twisted. "Indoctrination! We're told again and again that if *we* interfere, there's going to be punishment for us. I'm not allowed to go back and shoot that ruddy bastard Hitler in his cradle. I'm supposed to let him grow up as he did, and start the war, and kill my girl."

Everard rode quietly for a while. The only noise was the squeak of

saddle leather and the rustle of long grass. "Oh," he said at last. "I'm sorry. Want to talk about it?"

"Yes. I do. But there isn't much. She was in the WAAF — Mary Nelson — we were going to get married after the war. She was in London in '44. November seventeenth, I'll never forget that date. The V-bombs got her. She'd gone over to a neighbor's house in Streatham — was on furlough, you see, staying with her mother. That house was blown up; her own home wasn't scratched."

Whitcomb's cheeks were bloodless. He stared emptily before him. "It's going to be jolly hard not to . . . not to go back, just a few years, and see her at the very least. Only see her again . . . No! I don't dare."

Everard laid a hand on the man's shoulder, awkwardly, and they rode on in silence.

The class moved ahead, each at his own pace, but there was enough compensation so that all graduated together: a brief ceremony followed by a huge party and many maudlin arrangements for later reunions. Then they went back to the same years they had come from: the same hour.

Everard accepted Gordon's congratulations, got a list of contemporary agents (several of them holding jobs in places like military intelligence), and returned to his apartment. Later he might find

work arranged for him in some sensitive listening post, but his present assignment — for income-tax purposes, "special consultant to Engineering Studies Co." — was only to read a dozen papers a day for the indications of time travel he had been taught to spot, and hold himself ready for a call.

As it happened, he made his own first job.

III

It was a peculiar feeling to read the headlines and know, more or less, what was coming next. It took the tense edge off, but added a sadness, for this was a tragic era and he knew what man must go through. He could sympathize with Whitcomb's desire to go back and change history.

Only, of course, one man was too limited. He could not change it for the better, except by some freak — most likely, he would bungle everything. Go back and kill Hitler and the Japanese and Soviet leaders — maybe someone shrewder would take their place. Maybe atomic energy would lie fallow, and the glorious flowering of the Venusian Renaissance never happen. The devil we know . . .

He looked out his window. Lights flamed against a hectic sky; the street crawled with automobiles and a hurrying faceless crowd; he could not see the towers of Manhattan from here, but he knew they reared arrogant toward the clouds. And it

was all one swirl on a huge resistless river, sweeping thunderously from the peaceful pre-human landscape where he had been to the unimaginable Daneelian future. How many billions and trillions of human creatures lived, laughed, wept, worked, hoped, and died in its rushing currents!

Well . . . He sighed, stoked his pipe, and turned back. A long walk had not made him less restless; his mind and body were impatient for something to do. But it was late and — he went over to the bookshelf, picked out a volume more or less at random, and started to read. It was a collection of Victorian and Edwardian stories.

A passing reference struck him. Something about a tragedy at Ad-dleton and the singular contents of an ancient British barrow. Nothing more. Hm. Time travel? He smiled to himself.

Still —

No, he thought. *This is crazy.*

It wouldn't do any harm to check up, though. The incident was mentioned as occurring in the year 1894, in England. He could get out back files of the London *Times*. Nothing else to do . . . Probably that was why he was stuck with this dull newspaper assignment: so that his mind, grown nervous from boredom, would prowl into every conceivable corner.

He was on the steps of the public library as it opened.

The account was there, dated

June 25, 1894, and several days following. Addleton was a village in Kent, distinguished chiefly by a Jacobean estate belonging to Lord Wyndham and a barrow of unknown age. The nobleman, an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist, had been excavating it, together with one James Rotherhithe, an expert from the British Museum who happened to be a relative. Lord Wyndham had uncovered a rather meager Saxon burial chamber: a few artifacts nearly rusted and rotted away, bones of men and horses. There was also a chest in surprisingly good condition, containing ingots of an unknown metal presumed to be a lead or silver alloy. He fell deathly ill, with symptoms of a peculiarly lethal poisoning; Rotherhithe, who had barely looked into the casket, was not affected, and circumstantial evidence suggested that he had slipped the nobleman a dose of some obscure Asiatic concoction. Scotland Yard arrested the man when Lord Wyndham died, on the 25th. Rotherhithe's family engaged the services of a well-known consulting detective, who was able to show, by most ingenious reasoning followed by tests on animals, that the accused was innocent and that a "deadly emanation" from the chest was responsible. Box and contents had been thrown into the English Channel. Congratulations all around. Fadeout to happy ending.

Everard sat quietly in the long, hushed room. The story didn't tell

enough. But it was highly suggestive, to say the least.

Then why hadn't the Victorian office of the Patrol investigated? Or had they? Probably. They wouldn't advertise their results, of course.

Still, he'd better send a memorandum.

Returning to his apartment, he took one of the little message shuttles given him, laid a report in it, and set the control studs for the London office, June 25, 1894. When he pushed the final button, the box vanished with a small whoosh of air rushing in where it had been.

It returned in a few minutes. Everard opened it and took out a sheet of foolscap covered with neat typing — yes, the typewriter had been invented by then, of course. He scanned it with the swiftness he had learned.

Dear Sir:

In reply to yrs. of 6 September, 1954, beg to acknowledge receipt and would commend your diligence. The affair has only just begun at this end, and we are most occupied at present with preventing assassination of Her Majesty, as well as the Balkan Question, the 1890-22370 opium trade with China, &c. While we can of course settle current business and then return to this, it is well to avoid *curiosa* such as being in two places at once, which might be noticed. Would therefore much appreciate it if you and

some qualified British agent could come to our assistance. Unless we hear otherwise, we shall expect you at 14-B, Old Osborne Road, on 26 June, 1894, at 12 midnight.

Believe me, Sir, yr. humble & obt. svt.,

J. MAINWETHERING

There followed a note of the spatio-temporal coordinates, incongruous under all that floridity.

Everard called up Gordon, got an okay, and arranged to pick up a time hopper at the "company's" warehouse. Then he shot a note to Charlie Whitcomb in 1947, got a one-word reply — "Surely" — and went off to get his machine.

It was reminiscent of a motorcycle without wheels or handlebars. There were three saddles and an antigravity propulsion unit. Everard set the dials for Whitcomb's era, touched the main button, and found himself in another warehouse.

London, 1947. He sat for a moment, reflecting that at this instant he himself, seven years younger, was attending college back in the States. Then Whitcomb shouldered past the watchman and took his hand. "Good to see you again, old chap," he said. His haggard face lit up in the curiously charming smile which Everard had come to know. "And so — Victoria, eh?"

"Reckon so. Jump on." Everard re-set. This time he would emerge in an office. A very private inner office.

It blinked into existence around him. There was an unexpectedly heavy effect to the oak furniture, the thick carpet, the flaring gas mantles. Electric lights were available, but Dalhousie & Roberts was a notoriously solid, conservative import house. Mainwethering himself got out of a chair and came to greet them: a large and pompous man with bushy side whiskers and a monocle. But he moved with an air of strength, and his Oxford accent was so cultivated that Everard could hardly understand it.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Pleasant journey, I trust? Oh, yes . . . sorry . . . you gentlemen are new to the business, aren't you? Always a little disconcerting at first. I remember how shocked I was on a visit to the 21st century. Not British at all . . . Only a *res naturae*, though, only another facet of an always surprising universe. You must excuse my lack of hospitality, but we really are frightfully busy. Fanatic German up in 1917 learned the time travel secret from an unwary anthropologist, stole a machine, has come to London to assassinate Her Majesty. We're having the devil's own time finding him."

"Will you?" asked Whitcomb.

"Oh, yes. But deuced hard work, gentlemen, especially when one must operate secretly. I'd like to engage a private inquiry agent, but the only worthwhile one is entirely too clever, he might easily deduce the truth. His operating principle is

that when one has eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth — and I'm afraid he's very open-minded about what constitutes the improbable-but-possible."

"I'll bet he's the same man who's working on the Addleton case — or will be tomorrow," said Everard. "That isn't important; we know he'll prove Rotherhithe's innocence. What matters is the strong probability that there's been hanky-panky going on back in Saxon times."

"Yes . . . yes . . . hm. Clothes here, gentlemen. And funds. And papers, all prepared for you. I sometimes think you field agents don't appreciate how much work we have to do in the offices for even the smallest operation. Haw! Pardon. Have you a plan of campaign?"

"Yes." Everard was stripping off his 20th-century garments. "I think so. We both know enough about the Victorian era to get by. I'll have to remain American, though . . . yes, I see you put that in my papers."

Mainwethering looked mournful. "If the barrow incident has found its way into a famous piece of literature as you say, we shall be getting a hundred memoranda about it. Yours happened to come first. Two others have arrived since, from 1923 and 1960. Dear me, how I wish I were allowed a robot secretary!"

Everard struggled with the awkward suit. It fitted him well enough, his measurements were on file in

this office, but he hadn't appreciated the relative comfort of his own fashions before. Damn that waistcoat! "Look here," he said, "this business may be quite harmless. In fact, since we're here now, it must have *been* harmless. Eh?"

"As of now," said Mainwethering. "But consider. You two gentlemen go back to Saxon times and find the marauder. But you fail. Perhaps he shoots you before you can shoot him; perhaps he waylays those we send after you. Then he goes on to establish an industrial revolution or whatever he's after. History changes. You, being back there before the change-point, still exist . . . if only as cadavers . . . but we up here have never been. This conversation never took place. As Horace puts it —"

"Never mind!" laughed Whitcomb. "We'll investigate the barrow first, in this year, then pop back here and decide what's next." He bent over and began transferring equipment from a 20th-century handbag to a Gladstonian monstrosity of flowered cloth. A couple of guns, some physical and chemical apparatus which his own age had not invented, a tiny radio with which to call up the office in case of trouble.

Mainwethering consulted his Bradshaw. "You can get the 8:23 out of Charing Cross tomorrow morning," he said. "Allow half an hour to get from here to the station."

"Okay." Everard and Whitcomb remounted their hopper and vanished. Mainwethering sighed, yawned, left instructions with his clerk, and went home. At 7:45 A.M. the clerk was there when the hopper materialized.

This was the first moment that the reality of time travel struck home to Everard. He had known it with the top of his mind, been duly impressed, but it was, for his emotions, merely exotic. Now, clopping through a London he did not know in a hansom cab (not a tourist-trap anachronism, but a working machine, dusty and battered), smelling an air which held more smoke than a 20th-century city but no gasoline fumes, seeing the crowds which milled past — gentlemen in bowlers and top hats, sooty navvies, long-skirted women, and not actors but real, talking, perspiring, laughing and somber human beings off on real business — it hit him with full force that he was *here*. At this moment his mother had not been born, his grandparents were young couples just getting settled to harness, Grover Cleveland was President of the United States and Victoria was Queen of England, Kipling was writing and the last Indian uprisings in America yet to come. . . . It was like a blow on the head.

Whitcomb took it more calmly, but his eyes were always moving as he drank in this day of England's glory. "I begin to understand," he

murmured. "They never have agreed whether this was a period of unnatural, stuffy convention and thinly veneered brutality, or the last flower of Western civilization before it started going to seed. Just seeing these people makes me realize: it was everything they have said about it, good and bad, because it wasn't a simple thing happening to everyone but millions of individual lives."

"Sure," said Everard. "That must be true of every age."

The train was almost familiar, not very different from the carriages of British Railways Anno 1954, which gave Whitcomb occasion for sardonic remarks about inviolable traditions. In a couple of hours it let them off at a sleepy village station among carefully tended flower gardens, where they engaged a buggy to drive them to the Wyndham estate.

A polite constable admitted them after a few questions. They were passing themselves off as archaeologists, Everard from America and Whitcomb from Australia, who had been quite anxious to meet Lord Wyndham and were shocked by his tragic end. Mainwethering, who seemed to have tentacles everywhere, had supplied them with letters of introduction from a well-known authority at the British Museum. The inspector from Scotland Yard agreed to let them look at the barrow — "the case is solved, gentlemen, there are no more clues, even if my colleague does not agree,

hah, hah!" The private agent smiled sourly and watched them with a narrow eye as they approached the mound; he was tall, thin, hawk-faced, and accompanied by a burly, mustached fellow with a limp who seemed a kind of amanuensis.

The barrow was long and high, covered with grass save where a raw scar showed excavation to the funeral chamber. This had been lined with rough-hewn timbers but long ago collapsed; fragments of what had been wood still lay on the dirt. "The newspapers mentioned something about a metal casket," said Everard. "I wonder if we might have a look at it too?"

The inspector nodded agreeably and led them off to an outbuilding where the major finds were laid forth on a table. Except for the box, they were only fragments of corroded metal and crumbled bone.

"Hm," said Whitcomb. His gaze was thoughtful on the sleek bare face of the small chest. It shimmered bluely, some time-proof alloy yet to be discovered. "Most unusual. Not primitive at all. You'd almost think it had been machined, eh?"

Everard approached it warily. He had a pretty good idea of what was inside, and all the caution about such matters natural to a citizen of the *soi-disant* Atomic Age. Pulling a counter out of his bag, he aimed it at the box. Its needle wavered, not much but —

"Interesting item there," said the inspector. "May I ask what it is?"

"An experimental electroscope," lied Everard. Carefully, he threw back the lid and held the counter above the box.

God! There was enough radioactivity inside to kill a man in a day! He had just a glimpse of heavy, dull-shining ingots before he slammed the lid down again. "Be careful with that stuff," he said shakily. Praise heaven, whoever carried that devil's load had come from an age when they knew how to block off radiation!

The private detective had come up behind them, noiselessly. A hunter's look grew on his keen face. "So you recognize the contents, sir?" he asked quietly.

"Yes . . . I think so." Everard remembered that Becquerel would not discover radioactivity for almost two years; even X-rays were still more than a year in the future. He had to be cautious. "That is . . . in Indian territory I've heard stories about an ore which is poisonous —"

The detective's companion cleared his throat. "Indian, eh? Strange land, India. When I was in —"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," said the detective impatiently. "Surely it's obvious from the gentleman's accent that the Indians he refers to are redskins. . . . Most interesting." He began to stuff a well-blackened clay pipe. "Like mercury vapor, what?"

"So Rotherhithe placed that box in the grave, did he?" muttered the inspector.

"Don't be ridiculous!" snapped the detective. "I have three lines of conclusive proof that Rotherhithe is entirely innocent. What puzzled me was the actual cause of his lordship's death. But if, as this gentleman says, there happened to be a deadly poison buried in that mound . . . to discourage grave-robbers? I wonder, though, how the old Saxons came by an American mineral. Perhaps there is something to these theories about early Phoenician voyages across the Atlantic. I have done a little research on a notion of mine that there are Chaldean elements in the Cymric language, and this seems to bear me out."

Everard felt guilty about what he was doing to the science of archaeology. Oh, well, this box was going to be dumped in the Channel and forgotten. He and Whitcomb made an excuse to leave as soon as possible.

On the way back to London, when they were safely alone in their compartment, the Englishman took out a moldering fragment of wood. "Slipped this into my pocket at the barrow," he said. "It'll help us date the thing. Hand me that radiocarbon counter, will you?" He popped the wood into the device, turned some knobs, and read off the answer. "One thousand, four hundred and thirty years, plus or minus about ten. The mound went up around . . . um . . . 464 A.D., then, when the Saxons were just getting established in Kent."

"If those ingots are still that hellish after so long," murmured Everard, "I wonder what they were like originally? Hard to see how you could have that much activity with such a long half-life, but then, up in the future they can do things with the atom my period hasn't dreamed of."

Turning in their report to Mainwethering, they spent a day sight-seeing while he sent messages across time and activated the great machine of the Patrol. Everard was interested in Victorian London, almost captivated in spite of the grime and poverty. Whitcomb got a faraway look in his eyes. "I'd have liked to live here," he said.

"Yeah . . . with their medicine and dentistry?"

"And no bombs falling." Whitcomb's answer held an angry defiance.

Mainwethering had arrangements made when they returned to his office. Puffing a fat cigar, he strode up and down, pudgy hands clasped behind his tailcoat, and rattled off the story.

"Metal been identified with high probability. Isotopic fuel from around the 30th century. Checkup reveals that a merchant from the Ing Empire was visiting year 2987 to barter his raw materials for their synthrope, secret of which had been lost in the Interregnum. Naturally, he took precautions, tried to pass himself off as a trader from the Saturnian System, but nevertheless

disappeared. So did his time shuttle. Presumably someone in 2987 found out what he was and murdered him for his machine. Patrol notified, but no trace of machine. Finally recovered from 5th-century England by two Patrolmen named, haw!, Everard and Whitcomb."

"If we've already succeeded, why bother?" grinned the American.

Mainwethering looked shocked. "But my dear fellow! You have *not* already succeeded. The job is yet to do, in terms of your and my duration-sense. And please do not take success for granted merely because history records it. Time is not rigid; man has free will. If you fail, history will change and will not ever have recorded your success; I will not have told you about it. That is undoubtedly what happened, if I may use the term *happened*, in the few cases where the Patrol has a record of failure. Those cases are still being worked on, and if success is achieved at last, history will be changed and there will *always* have been success. *Tempus non nascitur, fit*, if I may indulge in a slight parody."

"All right, all right, I was only joking," said Everard. "Let's get going. *Tempus fugit*." He added an extra "g" with malice aforethought, and Mainwethering winced.

It turned out that even the Patrol knew little about the dark period when the Romans had left England, the Romano-British civilization was crumbling, and the Saxons were

moving in. It had never seemed an important one. The office at London, 1000 A.D., sent up what material it had, together with suits of clothes that would get by. Everard and Whitcomb spent an hour unconscious under the hypnotic educators, to emerge with fluency in Latin and in several Saxon and Jutish dialects, and with a fair knowledge of the mores.

The clothes were awkward: trousers, shirts, and coats of rough wool, leather cloaks, an interminable number of thongs and laces. Long flaxen wigs covered modern haircuts; a clean shave would pass unnoticed, even in the 5th century. Whitcomb carried an ax, Everard a sword, both made to measure of high-carbon steel, but put more reliance on the little 26th-century sonic stun guns tucked under their coats. Armor had not been included, but the time hopper had a pair of motorcycle crash helmets in one saddlebag: these would not attract much attention in an age of homemade equipment, and were a good deal stronger and more comfortable than the real thing. They also stowed away a picnic lunch and some earthenware jugs full of good Victorian ale.

"Excellent." Mainwethering pulled a watch out of his pocket and consulted it. "It shall expect you back here at . . . shall we say four o'clock? I will have some armed guards on hand, in case you have a prisoner along, and we can go out

to tea afterward." He shook their hands. "Good hunting!"

Everard swung onto the time hopper, set the controls for 464 A.D. at Addleton Barrow, a summer midnight, and threw the switch.

IV

There was a full moon. Under it, the land lay big and lonely, with a darkness of forest blocking out the horizon. Somewhere a wolf howled. The mound was there yet, they had come late.

Rising on the antigravity unit, they peered across a dense, shadowy wood. There was a thorp about a mile from the barrow, one hall of hewn timber and a cluster of smaller buildings around a courtyard. In the drenching moonlight, it was very quiet.

"Cultivated fields," observed Whitcomb. His voice was hushed in the stillness. "The Saxons were mostly yeomen, you know, who came here looking for land. Imagine the Britons were pretty well cleared out of this area some years ago."

"We've got to find out about that burial," said Everard. "Shall we go back and locate the moment the grave was made? — No, it might be safer to inquire now, at a later date when whatever excitement there was has died down. Say tomorrow morning."

Whitcomb nodded, and Everard brought the hopper down into the concealment of a thicket and jumped up five hours. The sun was blinding

in the northeast, dew was still on the long grass, and the birds were making an unholy racket. Dismounting, the agents sent the hopper shooting up at fantastic velocity, to hover ten miles aboveground and come to them when called on a midget radio built into their helmets.

They approached the thorp openly, whacking off the savage-looking dogs which came snarling at them with the flat of sword and ax. Entering the courtyard, they found it unpaved but richly carpeted with mud and manure. A couple of naked, tow-headed children gaped at them from a hut of earth and wattles. A girl who was sitting outside milking a scrubby little cow let out a small shriek; a thick-built, low-browed farmhand swilling the pigs grabbed for his spear. Wrinkling his nose, Everard wished that some of the Noble Nordic enthusiasts of his century could visit this one.

A gray-bearded man with an ax in his hand appeared in the hall entrance. Like everyone else of this period, he was several inches shorter than the 20th-century average. He studied them warily before wishing them good morning.

Everard smiled politely. "I hight Uffa Hundingsson, and my brother is Knubbi," he said. "We are merchants from Jutland, come hither to trade at Canterbury." (He gave it the present name, Cant-wara-byrig.) "Wandering from the place

where our ship is beached, we lost our way, and after fumbling about all night found your home."

"I hight Wulfnoth, son of Aelfred," said the yeoman. "Enter and break your fast with us."

The hall was big and dim and smoky, full of a chattering crowd: Wulfnoth's children, their spouses and children, dependent carls and *their* wives and children and grandchildren. Breakfast consisted of great wooden trenchers of half-cooked pork. It was not hard to get a conversation going; these people were as gossipy as isolated yokels anywhen. The trouble was with inventing plausible accounts of what was going on in Jutland. Once or twice Wulfnoth, who was no fool, caught them in some mistake, but Everard said firmly: "You have heard a falsehood. News takes strange forms when it crosses the sea." He was surprised to learn how much contact there still was with the old countries. But the talk of weather and crops was not much different from the kind he knew in the 20th-century Middle West.

Only later was he able to slip in a question about the barrow. Wulfnoth frowned, and his plump, toothless wife hastily made a protective sign toward a rude wooden idol. "It is not good to speak of such things," muttered the Saxon. "I would the wizard had not been buried on my land. But he was close to my father, who died last year and would hear of naught else."

"Wizard?" Whitcomb pricked up his ears. "What tale is this?"

"Well, you may as well know," grumbled Wulfnoth. "He was a stranger hight Stane, who appeared in Canterbury some six years ago. He must have been from far away, for he spoke not the English or British tongues, but King Hengist guested him and eftsoons he learned. He gave the king strange but goodly gifts, and was a crafty redesman, on whom the king came more and more to lean. None dared cross him, for he had a wand which threw thunderbolts and had been seen to cleave rocks and once, in battle with the Britons, burn men down. There are those who thought he was Woden, but that cannot be since he died."

"Ah, so." Everard felt a tingle of eagerness. "And what did he whilst yet he lived?"

"Oh . . . he gave the king wise redes, as I have said. It was his thought that we of Kent should cease thrusting back the Britons and calling in ever more of our kinsmen from the old country; rather, we should make peace with them. He thought that with our strength and their Roman learning, we could together shape a mighty realm. He may have been right, though I for one see little use in all these books and baths, to say naught of that weird cross-god they have. . . . Well, anyhow, he was slain by unknowns three years ago, and buried here with sacrifices and such of his

possessions as his foes had not reaved. We give him an offering twice a year, and I must say his ghost has not made trouble for us. But still am I somewhat uneasy about it."

"Three years, eh?" breathed Whitcomb. "I see. . . ."

It took a good hour to break away, and Wulfnoth insisted on sending a boy along to guide them to the river. Everard, who didn't feel like walking that far, grinned and called down the hopper. As he and Whitcomb mounted it, he said gravely to the bulging-eyed lad: "Know that thou hast guested Woden and Thunor, who will hereafter guard thy folk from harm." They jumped three years back.

"Now comes the rough part," he said, peering out of the thicket at the nighted thorp. The mound was not there now, the wizard Stane was still alive. "It's easy enough to put on a magic show for a kid, but we've got to extract this character from the middle of a big, tough town where he's the king's right-hand man. *And* he has a blast-ray."

"Apparently we succeeded — or will succeed," said Whitcomb.

"Nope. It's not irrevocable, you know. If we fail, Wulfnoth will be telling us a different story three years from now, probably that Stane is there — he may kill us twice! And England, pulled out of the Dark Ages into a neoclassical culture, won't evolve into anything you'd recognize by 1894. . . . I wonder what Stane's game is."

He lifted the hopper and sent it through the sky toward Canterbury. A night wind whistled darkly past his face. Presently the town loomed near, and he grounded in a copse. The moon was white on the half-ruined Roman walls of ancient Durovernum, dappled black on the newer earth and wood of the Saxon repairs. Nobody would get in after sunset.

Again the hopper brought them to daytime — near noon — and was sent skyward. His breakfast, two hours ago and three years in the future, felt soggy as Everard led the way onto a crumbling Roman road and toward the city. There was a goodly traffic, mostly farmers driving creaky ox carts of produce in to market. A pair of vicious-looking guards halted them at the gate and demanded their business. This time they were the agents of a trader on Thanet who had sent them to interview various artisans here. The hoodlums looked surly till Whitcomb slipped them a couple of Roman coins; then the spears went down and they went past.

The city brawled and bustled around them, though again it was the ripe smell which impressed Everard most. Among the jostling Saxons, he spotted an occasional Romano-Briton, disdainfully picking a way through the muck and pulling his shabby tunic clear of contact with these savages. It would have been funny if it weren't pathetic.

There was an extraordinarily dirty inn filling the moss-grown ruins of what had been a marble town house. Everard and Whitcomb found that their money was of high value, here where trade was still mostly in kind. By standing a few rounds of drinks, they got all the information they wanted. King Hengist's hall was near the middle of town . . . not really a hall, an old building which had been deplorably prettied up under the direction of that outlander Stane . . . not that our good and doughty king is any pantywaist, don't get me wrong, stranger . . . why, only last month . . . oh, yes, Stane! He lived in the house right next to it. Strange fellow, some said he was a god . . . he certainly had an eye for the girls . . . yes, they said he was behind all this peace-talk with the Britons. More and more of those slickers coming in every day, it's getting so an honest man can't let a little blood without . . . of course, Stane is very wise, I wouldn't say anything against him, understand, after all he can throw lightning . . .

"So what do we do?" asked Whitcomb, back in their own room. "Go on in and arrest him?"

"No . . . I doubt if that's possible," said Everard cautiously. "I've got a sort of a plan, but it depends on guessing what he really intends. Let's see if we can't get an audience." As he got off the straw tick which served for a bed, he was

scratching. "Damn! What this period needs isn't literacy but flea powder!"

The house had been carefully renovated, its white, porticoed façade almost painfully clean against the grubbiness around it. Two guards lounged on the stairs, snapping to alertness as the agents approached. Everard fed them money and a story about being a visitor who had news that would surely interest the great wizard. "Tell him, 'Man from tomorrow.' 'Tis a password. Got it?"

"It makes not sense," complained the guard.

"Passwords need not make sense," said Everard with hauteur.

The Saxon clanked off, shaking his head dolefully. All these new-fangled notions!

"Are you sure this is wise?" muttered Whitcomb. "He'll be on the alert now, you know."

"I also know a VIP isn't going to waste time on just any stranger. This business is urgent, man! So far, he hasn't accomplished anything permanent, not even enough to become a lasting legend; but if Hengist should make a genuine union with the Britons —"

The guard returned, grunted something, and led them up the stairs and across the peristyle. Beyond was the atrium, a good-sized room where modern bearskin rugs jarred with chipped marble and faded mosaics. There was a man standing before a rude wooden

couch. As they entered, he raised his hand, and Everard saw the slim barrel of a 30th-century blast-ray.

"Keep your hands in sight and well away from your sides," said the man gently. "Otherwise I shall be like have to smite you with a thunderbolt."

Whitcomb sucked in a sharp, dismayed breath, but Everard had been rather expecting this. Even so, there was a cold knot in his stomach.

The wizard Stane was a small man, dressed in a fine embroidered tunic which must have come from some British villa. His body was lithely muscled, his head large, with a face of rather engaging ugliness under a shock of black hair. There was a grin of tension on his lips.

"Search them, Eadgar," he ordered. "Take out aught they may bear in their clothing."

The Saxon's frisking was clumsy, but he found the stunners and tossed them to the floor. "Thou mayst go," said Stane.

"Is there no danger from them, my lord?" asked the soldier.

Stane grinned wider. "With this in my hand? Nay, go." Eadgar shambled out. *At least we still have sword and ax*, thought Everard. *But they're not much use with that thing looking at us.*

"So you come from tomorrow," murmured Stane. A sudden film of sweat glistened on his forehead. "I wondered about that. Speak you the later English tongue?"

Whitcomb opened his mouth, but Everard, improvising as he went with his life at wager, beat him to the draw. "What tongue mean you?"

"Thus-wise." Stane broke into an English which had a peculiar accent but was recognizable to 20th-century ears: "Ih want know where an' when y're from, what y'r 'tentions air, an' all else. Gimme d' facts 'r Ih'll burn y' doon."

Everard shook his head. "Nay," he answered in Saxon. "I understand you not." Whitcomb threw him a glance and then subsided, ready to follow the American's lead. Everard's mind raced; under the brassiness of desperation, he knew that death waited for his first mistake. "In our day we talked thus:—" And he reeled off a paragraph of Mexican-Spanish chatter, garbling it as much as he dared.

"So . . . a Latin tongue!" Stane's eyes flamed. The blaster shook in his hand. "*When* be you from?"

"The 20th century after Christ, and our land high Lyonesse. It lies across the western ocean—"

"America!" It was a gasp. "Was it ever called America?"

"No. I wot not what you speak of."

Stane shuddered uncontrollably. Mastering himself: "Know you the Roman tongue?"

Everard nodded.

Stane laughed nervously. "Then let us speak that. If you knew how sick I am of this Saxon hog-lan-

guage —" His Latin was a little broken, obviously picked up in this century, but fluent enough. He waved the blaster. "Pardon my discourtesy with this. But I have to be careful."

"Naturally," said Everard. "Ah . . . my name is Mencius, and my friend is Iuvenalis. We came from the future, as you have guessed; we are historians, and time travel has just been invented."

"Properly speaking, I am Rozher Schtein, from the year 2987. Have you . . . heard of me?"

"Who else?" said Everard. "We came back looking for this mysterious Stane who seemed to be one of the crucial figures of history. We suspected he might have been a —" Everard fumbled in his Latin vocabulary for an expression meaning *time traveler*, and finally improvised one. "— *peregrinator temporis*. Now we know."

"Three years." Schtein began pacing feverishly, the blaster swinging in his hand; but he was too far off for a sudden leap. "Three years I have been here. If you knew how often I have lain awake, wondering if I would succeed — Tell me, is your world united?"

"The world and the planets," said Everard. "It has been for a long time." Inwardly, he shivered. His life hung on his ability to guess what Schtein's plans were.

"And are you a free people?"

"We are. That is to say, the Emperor presides, but the Senate makes

the laws and it is elected by the people."

There was an almost holy look on the gnomish face, transfiguring it. "As I dreamed," whispered Schtein. "Thank you."

"So you came back from your period to . . . create history?"

"No," said Schtein. "To change it."

Words tumbled out of him, as if he had wished to speak and dared not for many years: "I was a historian too. By chance I met a man who claimed to be a merchant from the Saturnian moons, but since I had lived there once, I saw through the fraud. Investigating, I learned the truth. He was a time traveler from the very far future.

"You must understand, the age I lived in was a terrible one, and as a psychographic historian I realized that the war, poverty, and tyranny which cursed us were not due to any innate evil in man, but to simple cause and effect. Machine technology had risen in a world divided against itself, and war grew to be an ever larger and more destructive enterprise. There had been periods of peace, even fairly long ones: but the disease was too deep-rooted, conflict was a part of our very civilization. My family had been wiped out in a Venusian raid, I had nothing to lose. I took the time machine after . . . disposing of its owner.

"The great mistake, I thought, had been made back in the Dark Ages. Rome had united a vast em-

pire in peace, and out of peace justice can always arise. But Rome exhausted herself in the effort, and was now falling apart. The barbarians coming in were vigorous, they could do much, but they were quickly corrupted.

"But here is England. It has been isolated from the rotting fabric of Roman society. The Saxons are entering, filthy oafs but strong and willing to learn. In my history, they simply wiped out British civilization and then, being intellectually helpless, were swallowed up by the new — and evil — civilization called Western. I want to see something better happen.

"It hasn't been easy. You would be surprised how hard it is to survive in a different age until you know your way around, even if you have modern weapons and interesting gifts for the king. But I have Hengist's respect now, and increasingly more of the confidence of the Britons. I can unite the two peoples in a common war on the Picts. England will be one kingdom, with Saxon strength and Roman learning, powerful enough to stand off all invaders. Christianity is inevitable, of course, but I will see to it that it is the right kind of Christianity, one which will educate and civilize men without shackling their minds.

"Eventually England will be in a position to start taking over on the Continent. Finally . . . one world. I will stay here long enough to get

the anti-Pictish union started, then vanish with a promise to return later. If I reappear at, say, fifty-year intervals for the next several centuries, I shall be a legend, a god, who can make sure they stay on the right track."

"I have read much about St. Stanius," said Everard slowly.

"And I won!" cried Schtein. "I gave peace to the world." Tears were on his cheeks.

Everard moved closer. Schtein pointed the blast-ray at his belly, not yet quite trusting him. Everard circled casually, and Schtein swiveled to keep him covered. But the man was too agitated by the seeming proof of his own success to remember Whitcomb. Everard threw a look over his shoulder at the Englishman.

Whitcomb hurled his ax. Everard dove for the floor. Schtein screamed, and the blast-ray sizzled. The ax had cloven his shoulder. Whitcomb sprang, getting a grip on his gun hand. Schtein howled, struggling to force the blaster around. Everard jumped up to help. There was a moment of confusion.

Then the blaster went off again, and Schtein was suddenly a dead weight in their arms. Blood drenched their coats from the hideous opening in his chest.

The two guards came running in. Everard snatched his stunner off the floor and thumbed the ratchet up to full intensity. A flung spear grazed his arm. He fired twice, and the

burly forms crashed. They'd be out for hours.

Crouching a moment, Everard listened. A feminine scream sounded from the inner chambers, but no one was entering at the door. "I guess we've carried it off," he panted.

"Yes." Whitcomb looked dully at the corpse sprawled before him. It seemed pathetically small.

"I didn't mean for him to die," said Everard. "But time is . . . tough. It was written, I suppose."

"Better this way than a Patrol court and the exile planet," said Whitcomb.

"Technically, at least, he was a thief and a murderer," said Everard. "But it was a great dream he had."

"And we upset it."

"History might have upset it. Probably would have. One man just isn't powerful enough, or wise enough. I think most human misery is due to well-meaning fanatics like him there."

"So we just fold our hands and take what comes."

"Think of all your friends, up in 1947. They'd never even have existed."

Whitcomb took off his cloak and tried to wipe the blood from his clothes.

"Let's get going," said Everard. He trotted through the rear portal. A frightened concubine watched him with large eyes.

He had to blast the lock off an inner door. The room beyond held

an Ing-model time shuttle, a few boxes with weapons and supplies, some books. Everard loaded it all into the machine except the fuel chest. That had to be left, so that up in the future he would learn of this and come back to stop the man who would be God.

"Suppose you take this to the warehouse in 1894," he said. "I'll ride our hopper back and meet you at the office."

Whitcomb gave him a long stare. The man's face was drawn. Even as Everard watched him, it stiffened with resolution.

"All right, old chap," said the Englishman. He smiled, almost wistfully, and clasped Everard's hand. "So long. Good luck."

Everard stared after him as he entered the great steel cylinder. That was an odd thing to say, when they'd be having tea up in 1894 in a couple of hours.

Worry nagged him as he went out of the building and mingled with the crowd. Charlie was a peculiar cuss. Well —

No one interfered with him as he left the city and entered the thicket beyond. He called the time hopper back down and, in spite of the need for haste lest someone come to see what kind of giant bird had landed, cracked a jug of ale. He needed it badly. Then he took a last look at Saxon England and jumped up to 1894.

Mainwethering and his guards were there as promised. The officer

looked alarmed at the sight of one man arriving with blood clotting across his garments, but Everard gave him a reassuring report.

It took a while to wash up, change clothes, and deliver a full account to the secretary. By then, Whitcomb should have arrived in a hansom, but there was no sign of him. Mainwethering called the warehouse up on the radio, and turned back with a frown. "He hasn't come yet," he said. "Could something have gone wrong?"

"Hardly. Those machines are fool-proof." Everard gnawed his lip. "I don't know what the matter is. Maybe he misunderstood and went up to 1947 instead."

An exchange of notes revealed that Whitcomb had not reported in at that end either. Everard and Mainwethering went out for their tea. There was still no trace of Whitcomb when they got back.

"I had best inform the field agency," said Mainwethering. "Eh, what? They should be able to find him."

"No . . . wait." Everard stood for a moment, thinking. The idea had been germinating in him for some time. It was dreadful.

"Have you a notion?"

"Yes . . . sort of." Everard began shucking his Victorian suit. His hands trembled. "Get my 20th-century clothes, will you? I may be able to find him by myself."

"The Patrol will want a preliminary report of your idea and inten-

tions," reminded Mainwethering.

"To hell with the Patrol," said Everard.

v

London, 1944. The early winter night had fallen, and there was a thin cold wind blowing down streets which were gulfs of darkness. Somewhere came the dull crash of an explosion, and there was a fire burning, great red banners flapping above the huddled roofs.

Everard left his hopper on the sidewalk — nobody was out when the V-bombs were falling — had groped slowly through a shuddering murk. November 17; his trained memory had called up the date for him. Mary Nelson had died this day.

He found a public phone booth on the corner and looked in the directory. There were a lot of Nelsons, but only one Mary listed for the Streatham area. That would be the mother, of course — he had to guess that the daughter would have the same name. Nor did he know the time at which the bomb had struck, but there were ways to learn that.

Fire and thunder roared at him as he came out. He flung himself on his belly while glass whistled where he had been. November 17, 1944. The younger Manse Everard, lieutenant in the United States Army Engineers, was somewhere across the Channel, near the German guns. He couldn't recall exactly where, just then, and did not stop to make the effort. It didn't matter. He knew he

was going to survive *that* danger.

The new blaze was a lurid red dance behind him as he ran for his machine. He jumped aboard and took off into the air. High above London, he saw only a vast darkness spotted with flame. Walpurgisnacht, and all hell let loose on earth!

He remembered Streatham well, a dreary stretch of brick inhabited by little clerks and greengrocers and mechanics, the very petite bourgeoisie who had stood up and fought to a standstill the power which had conquered Europe. There had been a girl living there, back in 1943 . . . eventually she married someone else.

Skimming low, he tried to find the address. A volcano erupted not far off. His mount staggered in the air, he almost lost his seat. Hurrying toward the place, he saw a house tumbled and smashed and flaming. It was only three blocks from the Nelson home. He was too late.

No! He checked the time — just 10:30 — and jumped back two hours. It was still night, but the slain house stood solid in the gloom. Briefly, he wanted to warn those inside. But no — all over the world, millions of people were dying. He was not Schtein, to take history on his shoulders.

Then he grinned wryly, dismounted, and walked through the gate. He was not a damned Daneel-ian either. He knocked on the door, and it opened. A middle-aged woman looked at him through the

murk, and he realized it was odd to see an American in civilian clothes here.

"Excuse me," he said. "Do you know Miss Mary Nelson?"

"Why . . . yes." Hesitation. "She lives nearby. She's coming over soon. Are you a friend?"

Everard nodded. "She sent me here with a message for you, Mrs. —"

"Enderby."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Enderby. I'm terribly forgetful. Look, Miss Nelson wanted me to say she's very sorry but she can't come. However, she wants you and your entire family over at 10:30."

"All of us, sir? But the children —"

"By all means, the children too. Every one of you. She has a very special surprise arranged, something she can only show you then. All of you have to be there."

"Well . . . all right, sir, if she says so."

"All of you at 10:30, without fail. I'll see you then, Mrs. Enderby." Everard nodded and walked back to the street.

He had done what he could. Next was the Nelson house. He rode his hopper three blocks down, parked it in the gloom of an alley, and walked up to the house. He was guilty too now, as guilty as Schtein. He wondered what the exile planet was like.

There was no sign of the Ing shuttle, and it was too big to conceal. So Charlie hadn't arrived yet. He'd have to play by ear till then.

As he knocked on the door, he wondered what his saving of the Enderby family would mean. Those children would grow up, have children of their own — quite insignificant middle-class Britons, no doubt, but somewhere in the centuries to come an important man would be born or fail to be born. Of course, time was not very flexible. Except in rare cases, the precise ancestry didn't matter, only the broad pool of human genes and human society. Still, this might be one of those rare cases.

A young woman opened the door for him. She was a pretty little girl, not spectacular but nice-looking in her trim uniform. "Miss Nelson?"

"Yes . . .?"

"My name is Everard. I'm a friend of Charlie Whitcomb. May I come in? I have a rather surprising bit of news for you."

"I was about to go out," she said apologetically.

"No, you weren't." Wrong line; she was stiffening with indignation. "Sorry. Please, may I explain?"

She led him into a drab and cluttered parlor. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Everard? Please don't talk too loudly. The family are all asleep. They get up early."

Everard made himself comfortable. Mary perched on the edge of the sofa, watching him with large eyes. He wondered if Wulfnoth and Eadgar were among her ancestors. Yes . . . undoubtedly they were, after all these centuries. Maybe Schtein was too.

"Are you in the Air Force?" she asked. "Is that how you met Charlie?"

"No. I'm in Intelligence, which is the reason for this mufti. May I ask when you last saw him?"

"Oh . . . weeks ago. He's stationed in France just now. I hope this war will soon be over. So silly of them to keep on when they must know they're finished, isn't it?" She cocked her head curiously. "But what is this news you have?"

"I'll come to it in a moment." He began to ramble as much as he dared, talking of conditions across the Channel. It was strange to sit conversing with a ghost. And his conditioning prevented him from telling the truth. He wanted to, but when he tried his tongue froze up on him.

"— and what it costs to get a bottle of red-ink ordinaire —"

"Please," she interrupted impatiently. "Would you mind coming to the point? I do have an engagement for tonight."

"Oh, sorry. Very sorry, I'm sure. You see, it's this way —"

A knock at the door saved him. "Excuse me," she murmured, and went out past the blackout drapes to open it. Everard padded after her.

She staggered back with a small shriek. "*Charlie!*"

Whitcomb pressed her to him, heedless of the blood still wet on his Saxon clothes. Everard came into the hall, and the Englishman stared with a kind of horror. "You —"

He snatched for his stunner, but

Everard's was already out. "Don't be a fool," said the American. "I'm your friend. I want to help you. What crazy scheme did you have, anyway?"

"I . . . keep her here . . . keep her from going to —"

"And do you think *they* haven't got means of spotting you?" Everard slipped into Temporal, the only possible language in Mary's frightened presence. "When I left Mainwethering, he was getting damn suspicious. Unless we do this right, every unit of the Patrol is going to be alerted. The error will be rectified, probably by killing her. You'll go to exile."

"I—" Whitcomb gulped. His face was a mask of fear. "You . . . would you let her go ahead and die?"

"No. But this has to be done more carefully."

"We'll escape . . . find some period away from everything . . . go back to the dinosaur age, if we must."

Mary stepped away from him. Her mouth was pulled open, ready to scream. "Shut up!" said Everard to her. "Your life is in danger, and we're trying to save you. If you don't trust me, trust Charlie."

Turning back to the man, he went on in Temporal: "Look, fellow, there isn't any place or any time you can hide. Mary Nelson died tonight. That's history. She wasn't around in 1947. That's history. I've already got myself in Dutch — the family she was going to will be out of their home when the bomb hits it. If you

try to run away with her, you'll be found. It's pure luck that a Patrol unit hasn't already arrived."

Whitcomb fought for steadiness. "Suppose I jump up to 1948 with her. How do you know she hasn't suddenly reappeared in 1948? Maybe that's history too."

"Man, you *can't*. Try it. Go on, tell her you're going to hop her four years into the future."

Whitcomb groaned. "A giveaway — and I'm conditioned —"

"Yeah. You have barely enough latitude to appear this way before her, but talking to her, you'll have to lie out of it because you can't help yourself. Anyway, how would you explain her? If she stays Mary Nelson, she's a deserter from the WAAF. If she takes another name, where's her birth certificate, her school record, her ration book, any of those bits of paper these 20th-century governments worship so devoutly? It's hopeless, son."

"Then what can we *do*?"

"Face the Patrol and slug it out. Wait here a minute." There was a cold calm over Everard, no time to be afraid or to wonder at his own incredible quixotism.

Returning to the street, he located his hopper and set it to emerge five years in the future, at high noon in Piccadilly Circus. He slapped down the main switch, saw the machine vanish, and went back inside. Mary was in Whitcomb's arms, shuddering and weeping. The poor, damned babes in the woods!

"Okay." Everard led them back to the parlor and sat down with his gun ready. "Now we wait."

It didn't take long. A hopper appeared, with two men in Patrol gray aboard. There were weapons in their hands. Everard cut them down with a low-powered stun beam. "Help me tie 'em up, Charlie," he said.

Mary huddled voiceless in a corner.

When the men awoke, Everard stood over them with a bleak-smile. "What are you charged with, boys?" he asked in Temporal.

"I think you know," said one of the prisoners calmly. "The main office had us trace you. Checking up next week, we found that you had evacuated a family scheduled to be bombed. Whitcomb's record suggested you had then come here, to help him save this woman who was supposed to die tonight. Better let us go or it will be the worse for you."

"I have not changed history," said Everard. "The Daneelians are still up there, aren't they?"

"Yes, of course, but —"

"How did you know the Enderby family was supposed to die?"

"Their house was struck, and they said they had only left it because —"

"Ah, but the point is they *did* leave it. That's written. Now it's you who wants to change the past."

"But this woman here —"

"Are you sure there wasn't a Mary Nelson who, let us say, settled in London in 1850 and died of old age about 1900?"

The lean face grinned savagely. "You're trying hard, aren't you? It won't work. You can't fight the entire Patrol."

"Can't I, though? I can leave you here to be found by the Enderbys. I've set my hopper to emerge in public at an instant known only to myself. What's that going to do to history?"

"The Patrol will take corrective measures . . . as you did back in the 5th century."

"Perhaps! I can make it a lot easier for them, though, if they'll hear my appeal. I want a Daneelian."

"What?"

"You heard me," said Everard. "If necessary, I'll mount that hopper of yours and ride a million years up. I'll point out to them personally how much simpler it'll be if they give us a break."

That will not be necessary.

Everard spun around with a gasp. The stunner fell from his hand.

He could not look at the shape which blazed before his eyes. There was a dry sobbing in his throat as he backed away.

Your appeal has been considered, said the soundless voice. It was known and weighed ages before you were born. But you were still a necessary link in the chain of time. If you had failed tonight, there would be no mercy.

To us, it was a matter of record that one Charles and Mary Whitcomb lived in Victoria's England. It was also a matter of record that Mary Nel-

son died with the family she was visiting in 1944, and that Charles Whitcomb had lived a bachelor and finally been killed on active duty with the Patrol. The discrepancy was noted, and as even the smallest paradox is a dangerous weakness in the space-time fabric, it had to be rectified by eliminating one or the other fact from ever having existed. You have decided which it will be.

Everard knew, somewhere in his shaking brain, that the Patrolmen were suddenly free. He knew that his hopper had been . . . was being . . . would be snatched invisibly away the instant it materialized. He knew that history now read: WAAF Mary Nelson missing, presumed killed by bomb near the home of the Enderby family, who had all been at her house when their own was destroyed; Charles Whitcomb disappearing in 1947, presumed accidentally drowned. He knew that Mary was given the truth, conditioned against ever revealing it, and sent back with Charlie to 1850. He knew they would make their middle-class way through life, never feeling quite at home in Victoria's reign, that Charlie would often have wistful thoughts of what he had been in the Patrol . . . and then turn to his wife and children and decide it

had not been such a great sacrifice after all.

That much he knew, and then the Daneelian was gone. As the whirling darkness in his head subsided and he looked with clearing eyes at the two Patrolmen, he did not know what his own destiny was.

"Come on," said the first man. "Let's get out of here before somebody wakes up. We'll give you a lift back to your year — 1954, isn't it?"

"And then what?" asked Everard wonderingly.

The Patrolman shrugged. Under his casual manner lay the shakenness which had seized him in the Daneelian presence. "Report to your sector chief. You've shown obviously unfit for steady work."

"So . . . just cashiered, huh?"

"You needn't be so dramatic. Did you think this case was the only one of its kind in a million years of Patrol work? There's a regular procedure for it.

"You'll want more training, of course. Your type of personality goes best with unattached status — any age, any place, wherever and whenever you may be needed. I think you'll like it."

Everard climbed weakly aboard the hopper. And when he got off again, a decade had passed.



Nobody Hunts Witches

by P. M. HUBBARD

We are for the sweep of the wide
night skies,
Bursting in a moment from the
darkened room,
The speed of the whistle of the
wind on thighs
Sitting up astraddle on a big,
bare broom.
But nobody hunts us witches
now;
Nobody grudges us the streaming
stars;
Nobody worries with gravita-
tion,
Being briefed in planetary naviga-
tion
And flying saucers and men from
Mars.

We are for the high, unlikely places,
The wind in the wood and the
wailing note.
Of pipe and tympani, the solemn
paces
Of eleven ladies and a dancing
goat.
But nobody hunts us witches
now;
Nobody cavils at a coven's way:
They have all been exercised in
self-expression,
In the Cinerama and the be-bop
session
And the mass emotion of a later
day.

We are for managing to make things
die,
The bantam's blood upon the
barnyard door,
The emptied furrow and the storm-
filled sky,
The dried-up water and the un-
healed sore.
But nobody hunts us witches now,
Nobody minds what spells one
casts:
They have all gone gunning for
new oppressors,
The business bosses and the pink
professors
And the famous physicists with
foolish pasts.

We are for the primal, personal
sins,
The private probings on the single
track,
The furry familiar, the jabbed-in
pins,
The small-scale errands for the
man in black.
But nobody hunts us witches now;
Nobody bothers us with bell and
ban:
Nobody nowadays seems to heed
us,
Us or the church that would super-
sede us,
Both of us being for the single
man.

James Blish is ordinarily one of the most sober and serious of science fiction writers. But he is also a critic, with quite a literary reputation outside of our field; and here he employs his critical skill to produce an astute and hilarious triptych of parodies of three familiar (far too familiar!) types of science fiction.



With Malice to Come

by JAMES BLISH

I: A Feast of Reason

AS IT HAPPENED, THE FIRST PLANET to which the ZZZ Zynergy Planetary Exploitation Administration — consisting of two men — was assigned was Mars. It was Grig Dickard, of course, who was to do the actual job; his partner Adolph stayed behind in the office, paring his fingernails with a dagger made of Wurdge-wood and cooking up new schemes for making millions.

The difficulty was that — also as usual — both men had failed to find out from their new employer just what the job was.

Since the spaceship flew itself, this left Grig with very little to think about. As a result, he had occupied himself through most of the two week trip with a running argument, by radio, with Adolph. Subject: what was the dominant race on Mars? Grig had forgotten to look it up before leaving, and Adolph

couldn't read, so both men were driven to falling back upon their intelligence.

"I seem to remember," Adolph's distant voice said, "that the oxygen tension on the planet is too low to support any life higher than that of the insect."

"Suppose it is?" Grig said impatiently. "The point is —"

"Now, what's the highest type of insect?" Adolph continued implacably. "The termite, of course. You see if I'm not right."

"Nonsense," Grig retorted. "Everybody knows that a giant insect can't live. The inverse-cube law, or something. What you fail to take into account —"

"Who said anything about giant —"

"— is the historical factor. Mars has been the Planet of War since prehistoric times. Where there's smoke, there's got to be fire. Mars is probably where that old warrior

cult originated — the what's-it's-name, the Nasties."

"Hello," said the radio.

"What d'you mean, hello?" Grig said. "Haven't we met before?"

"I wasn't talking to you, stupid," Adolph's voice said. "It's our client. He's just come into the office. How are you, Mr. Grummummmum?"

There was an indistinct rumble from the loudspeaker. Grig suddenly remembered all the long hours he had kicked himself for not questioning Grummummmum more closely before the trip started. "Hey, Adolph," he shouted into the mike. "Ask *him!*"

More indistinct rumbles, and then Adolph's voice. "He says there's excellent reason to suppose that Mars is inhabited exclusively by . . . did you say *jackasses*? Yeah, that's what he said.

"Why?"

After a while, Adolph said, "I made him write this down so I'd be sure I had it right. It's on the basis of something called Bernoulli's Principle, which says that if we are wholly ignorant of the different ways an event can occur, and therefore have no reasonable ground for preference —"

"Hold everything," Grig said. "I think we're coming in for a landing. Yes, we are. I'll talk to you in a minute."

The landing was uneventful, giving Grig plenty of time to rig the radio so that he could still talk to Adolph while outside the ship. As

he left the airlock, Adolph was saying, "— then that event is as likely to occur one way as another. That right, Mr. Grummummmum?"

The Martian air was too thin to carry ZZZ's client's answer. Nearby, Grig saw something moving, but he motioned it away. It was important to get to the bottom of this before even risking any dealings with the natives.

"So where does that leave us?" he demanded.

"Why, it means that the probabilities of the Martians being termites, Nasties or jackasses is exactly equal. What else?"

"But," Grig spluttered, "that's an impossible conclusion. It leaves us with three exclusive alternatives, each one of which is as likely as the other two!"

"Well, don't blame *me*. That's what he says."

The Martian, which had waited politely for the argument to end, apparently took Grig's despairing shrug as a signal. Still chewing placidly on its cud of wood, it rose politely on its rear legs, exposing the swastika emblazoned on its chest.

"Heehaw, O Earthman," it said.

II: *The Billion-Year Binge*

The rocket came down with a terrible bang and then stood silent on the red Martian desert. It shone in the Martian sunlight, silvered like the fish Mom used to bring

home on Sundays, after you'd watched the summer nodding like a bright jack-in-the-pulpit toward the purple evening.

As soon as he was sure everything was really all right, Father turned off all the sparkplugs. All but one.

"In case we need to go back up again," he said gravely. "We may need to go back up again, after all."

"You know very well that you won't want to go back up again," Mom said, coming out of the kitchenette. Her hair shone like bright cornsilk in the streak of Martian sunlight that was coming through the open porthole. I wanted to run to her, but I didn't because James was crying underneath the control board and I had to show that I was older and braver than he was.

"Well, we might want to go up again," Father said. He and mother looked at each other, like children look when they are looking at each other. The sparkplug he had left going ticked in the room like the clock that ticked you to sleep when you were little and all the stars were little glowing points on your nursery wallpaper that Father had put there, painstakingly licking the back of each one and pasting it on.

"No, we mightn't," Mom said.

"When do we go out, anyhow?" I said.

"We're already out," Father said, going to the porthole and looking out of it, his eyes like those of a man looking into a tropical fish tank and

seeing there the little fish, shining like spaceships, circling around the toy diver that made real bubbles in the glowing water. "We got out just in time."

He took a deep breath of the still, wintery air.

"What do you see?" Mom said.

"I see great shining cities, run by just governments of simple people, and kind people, people who are kind to the ghostly Martians who drift through them."

I ran to the porthole and looked out. I didn't see any cities. I saw millions and millions of beer cans — millions of them, all rusty with the rusty red of the Martian desert.

"I don't see any cities," I said. "All I see are some old beer cans. All the way to the horizon."

"Those are what we'll build the shining cities with," Father breathed. "We'll pile them up, one on top of the other. We'll bring old Mars back to life."

"Gee," I said. "But, Dad — what about the ghostly Martians?"

He turned and pointed to me and James. "You," he said, "will be the Martians."

I was surprised.

III: A Matter of Energy

As soon as I saw Joe Jones, I knew that he was the man I needed to send back to the Augustan Age. I knew it because I could not read his expression.

To the ordinary man who can't

even read his own expression this wouldn't be a significant datum, but with me it is different. As a consulting industrial psionic psychologist I am accustomed to reading the faces of anything, even checks. I always understand everybody instantly.

But I didn't understand Joe Jones. He was Everyman's nobody. He had no emotions. If he had had them, I could have read them — if not by the patterns formed by the hairs in his moustache, then by the psionic techniques which I have developed by correspondence with psychotic people all over the country. So it had to be true that Joe had no emotions.

He was the perfect man to go back in time and take over the Augustan Age for me.

"Joe," I asseverated, "I've given you the invincible weapon to take over the Romans: twisted semantics. It can't fail, but if it does, try twisted dianetics. Do you understand what you're to do?"

"Yes, Cliff," he lippled thinly.

"But there's one danger I haven't warned you of until now," I admonished sternly. "You must not use Arabic numerals while you're in Rome. The Romans didn't know them. If you use them, you will be driven to hide like a witch. Understand?"

"Yes, Cliff," he acknowledged flatly.

"Now, I haven't given you any training in how to calculate in

Roman numerals," I outpointed. "I could have given it to you by my own revolutionary educational system, or implanted it on your cerebral cortex with my psionic powers, but there's one great drawback: calculating with Roman numerals just takes too long. You wouldn't have time to take over the Empire if you had to do all your figuring that way. Is that clear?"

"That's clear, Cliff," he admitted immediately.

"So," I perorated triumphantly, "I've provided you with the answer, inside this little black box. This is a computer, called the THROBAC. That's short for *THR*ifty *RO*man-numeral *BA*ckwards-looking Calculator. It will add, subtract, multiply or divide in Roman numerals, and give you the answer in Roman numerals. Coupling and that crowd at Bell think that they invented it, but I can see through *them* like a glass of antigravity elixir. Use this machine — secretly, of course — whenever you need to do any figuring. Do you dig me?"

"I dig you, Cliff," he penultimated.

"Then go," I concluded commandingly. He stepped into the time machine, which I had named ELSIE, and vanished at once. With the help of my psionic correspondents I could have sent him back without a machine, but this whole operation had to be kept secret from the politicians, industrialists,

and other pressure groups who might bring twisted semantics to bear on me.

He was back in no time, of course. He had instructions to return to this moment, no matter how long he stayed in ancient Rome. But there was something wrong.

I could read his expression!

"What have you done?" I hissed grindingly.

"I did just like you said, Cliff," he replied defensively. "Soon as I had to do some figuring, I holed up in my room and plugged THROBAC into the nearest socket. But —"

"Get to the point!" I ordered commandingly.

"But Cliff," he wailed protestingly, "you overlooked something. THROBAC operates only on AC current! And the first AC generator wasn't built until after the 1830's — A.D.!"

I was crushed. That small oversight — no, it was an undersight, typical of me, underestimating the extent of my own massive knowledge — must have blown every fuse and circuit-breaker in Augustan Rome. I rushed to the nearest history book.

What had I undone?



It's dangerous to probe too far into the symbolism of a good story: as MacLeish said of a poem, a story should not mean, but be. I'll venture, however, to suggest something of the meaning of this curious and terrible little episode conceived by Mr. Beaumont: If you devote your life to the philosophy of Something-For-Nothing (as so relentlessly propagandized on the lowest levels of daytime TV), retribution too may come For Nothing: the Blind Gods are the least safe from whom to seek favors. . . .

Free Dirt

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

NO FOWL HAD EVER LOOKED SO posthumous. Its bones lay stacked to one side of the plate like kindling: white, dry and naked in the soft light of the restaurant. Bones only, with every shard and filament of meat stripped methodically off. Otherwise, the plate was a vast glistening plain.

The other, smaller dishes and bowls were equally virginal. They shone fiercely against one another. And all a pale cream color fixed upon the snowy white of a tablecloth unstained by gravies and unspotted by coffee and free from the stigmata of breadcrumbs, cigarette ash and fingernail lint.

Only the dead fowl's bones and the stippled traceries of hardened red gelatine clinging timidly to the bottom of a dessert cup gave evidence that these ruins had once been a magnificent six-course dinner.

Mr. Aorta, not a small man, permitted a mild belch, folded the newspaper he had found on the chair, inspected his vest for food leavings and then made his way briskly to the cashier.

The old woman glanced at his check.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"All righty," Mr. Aorta said and removed from his hip pocket a large black wallet. He opened it casually, whistling "The Seven Joys of Mary" through the space provided by his two front teeth.

The melody stopped, abruptly. Mr. Aorta looked concerned. He peered into his wallet, then began removing things; presently its entire contents was spread out.

He frowned.

"What seems to be the difficulty, sir?"

"Oh, no difficulty," the fat man

said, "exactly." Though the wallet was manifestly empty, he flapped its sides apart, held it upside down and continued to shake it, suggesting the picture of a hydrophobic bat suddenly seized in mid-air.

Mr. Aorta smiled a weak harassed smile and proceeded to empty all of his fourteen separate pockets. In time the counter was piled high with miscellany.

"Well!" he said impatiently. "What nonsense! What bother! Do you know what's happened? My wife's gone off and forgotten to leave me any change! Heigh-ho, well, ah — my name is James Brockelhurst: I'm with the Pliofilm Corporation: I generally don't eat out, and — here, no, I insist. This is embarrassing for you as well as for myself. I *insist* upon leaving my card. If you will retain it, I shall return tomorrow evening at this time and reimburse you."

Mr. Aorta shoved the pasteboard into the cashier's hands, shook his head, shoveled the residue back into his pockets and, plucking a toothpick from a box, left the restaurant.

He was quite pleased with himself — an invariable reaction to the acquisition of something for nothing in return. It had all gone smoothly, and what a delightful meal!

He strolled in the direction of the streetcar stop, casting occasional licentious glances at undressed mannequins in department store windows.

The prolonged fumbling for his car token worked as efficiently as ever. (Get in the middle of the crowd, look bewildered, inconspicuous, search your pockets earnestly, the while edging from the vision of the conductor — then, take a far seat and read a newspaper.) In four years' traveling time, Mr. Aorta computed he had saved a total of \$211.20.

The electric's ancient list did not jar his warm feeling of serenity. He studied the amusements briefly, then went to work on the current puzzle, whose prize ran into the thousands. Thousands of dollars, actually for nothing. Something for nothing. Mr. Aorta loved puzzles.

But the fine print made reading impossible.

Mr. Aorta glanced at the elderly woman standing near his seat; then, because the woman's eyes were full of tired pleading and insinuation, he refocused out the wire cross-hatch windows.

What he saw caused his heart to throb. The section of town was one he passed every day, so it was a wonder he'd not noticed it before — though generally there was little provocation to sight-see on what was irreverently called "Death Row" — a dreary round of mortuaries, columbariums, crematories and the like, all crowded into a five-block area.

He yanked the stop-signal, hurried to the rear of the streetcar and depressed the exit plate. In a few

moments he had walked to what he'd seen.

It was a sign, artlessly lettered though spelled correctly enough. It was not new, for the white paint had swollen and cracked and the rusted nails had dripped trails of dirty orange over the face of it.

The sign read:

FREE DIRT
APPLY WITHIN
LILYVALE
CEMETERY

and was posted upon the moldering green of a woodboard wall.

Now Mr. Aorta felt a familiar sensation come over him. It happened whenever he encountered the word *FREE*—a magic word that did strange and wonderful things to his metabolism.

Free. What is the meaning, the *essence* of free? Why, something for nothing. And, as has been pointed out, to get something for nothing was Mr. Aorta's chiefest pleasure in this mortal life.

The fact that it was dirt which was being offered *free* did not oppress him. He seldom gave more than fleeting thought to these things; for, he reasoned, nothing is without its use.

The other, subtler circumstances surrounding the sign scarcely occurred to him: why the dirt was being offered, where free dirt in a cemetery would logically come from;

et cetera. In this connection he considered only the probable richness of the soil.

Mr. Aorta's solitary hesitation encircled such problems as: Was this offer an honest one, without strings whereby he would have to buy something? Was there a limit on how much he could take home? If not, what would be the best method of transporting it?

Petty problems: all solvable.

Mr. Aorta did something inwardly that resembled a smile, looked about and finally located the entrance to the Lilyvale Cemetery.

These desolate grounds, which had accommodated in turn a twine factory, an upholstering firm and an outlet for ladies' shoes, now lay swathed in a miasmic vapor—accreditable, in the absence of nearby bogs, to a profusion of windward smokestacks. The blistered hummocks, peaked with crosses, slabs and stones, loomed gray and sad in the gloaming: withal, a place purely delightful to describe, and a pity it cannot be—for how it looked there that evening had little to do with the fat man and what was eventually to become of him.

Important only that it was a place full of dead people on their backs under ground, moldering and moldered.

Mr. Aorta hurried because he despised to waste, along with everything else, time. It was not long before he had encountered the proper

party and had this conversation:
"I understand you're offering free dirt."

"Yes."

"How much may one have?"

"Much as you want."

"On what days?"

"Any days — and there'll always be some fresh."

Mr. Aorta sighed in the manner of one who has just acquired a lifetime inheritance or a measured checking account. He then made an appointment for the following Saturday and went home to ruminate agreeable ruminations.

At a quarter past 9 that night he hit upon an excellent use to which the dirt might be put.

His back yard, an ochre waste, lay chunked and dry, a barren stretch repulsive to all but the grossest weeds. A tree had once flourished there, in better days, a haven for suburbanite birds; but then the birds disappeared for no good reason except that this is when Mr. Aorta moved into the house, and the tree became an ugly naked thing.

No children played in this yard.

Mr. Aorta was intrigued. Who could say, perhaps something might be made to grow! He had long ago written an enterprising firm for free samples of seeds, and received enough to feed an army. But the first experiments had shriveled into hard useless pips and, seized by lassitude, Mr. Aorta had shelved the project. Now . . .

A neighbor named Joseph William Santucci permitted himself to be intimidated. He lent his old Reo truck, and after a few hours the first load of dirt had arrived and been shoveled into a tidy mound. It looked beautiful to Mr. Aorta, whose passion overcompensated for his weariness with the task. The second load followed, and the third, and the fourth, and it was dark as a coalbin out when the very last was dumped.

Mr. Aorta returned the truck and fell into an exhausted, though not unpleasant sleep.

The next day was heralded by the distant clangor of church bells and the *chink-chink* of Mr. Aorta's spade, leveling the displaced graveyard soil, distributing it and grinding it in with the crusty earth. It had a continental look, this new dirt: swarthy, it seemed, black and saturnine: not at all dry, though the sun was already quite hot.

Soon the greater portion of the yard was covered, and Mr. Aorta returned to his sitting room.

He turned on the radio in time to identify a popular song, marked his discovery on a postcard and mailed this away, confident that he would receive either a toaster or a set of nylon hose for his trouble.

Then he wrapped four bundles containing, respectively: a can of vitamin capsules, half of them gone; a half-tin of coffee; a half-full bottle of spot remover; and a box of soap flakes with most of the soap flakes missing. These he mailed, each with

a note curtly expressing his total dissatisfaction, to the companies that had offered them to him on a money-back guarantee.

Now it was dinner time, and Mr. Aorta beamed in anticipation. He sat down to a meal of sundry delicacies such as anchovies, sardines, mushrooms, caviar, olives and pearl onions. It was not, however, that he enjoyed this type of food for any esthetic reasons: only that it had all come in packages small enough to be slipped into one's pocket without attracting the attention of busy grocers.

Mr. Aorta cleaned his plates so thoroughly no cat would care to lick them; the empty tins also looked new and bright: even their lids gleamed iridescently.

Mr. Aorta glanced at his check book balance, grinned indecently, and went to look out the back window. (He was not married, so he felt no urge to lie down after dinner.)

The moon was cold upon the yard. Its rays passed over the high fence Mr. Aorta had constructed from free rocks, and splashed moodily onto the now black earth.

Mr. Aorta thought a bit, put away his check book and got out the boxes containing the garden seeds.

They were good as new.

Joseph William Santucci's truck was in use every Saturday thereafter for five weeks. This good man watched curiously as his neighbor returned each time with more dirt

and yet more, and he made several remarks to his wife about the oddness of it all, but she could not bear even to talk about Mr. Aorta.

"He's robbed us blind!" she said. "Look! He wears your old clothes, he uses my sugar and spices and borrows everything else he can think of! Borrows, did I say? I mean steals. For years! I have not seen the man pay for a thing yet! Where does he work he makes so little money?"

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Santucci knew that Mr. Aorta's daily labors involved sitting on the sidewalk downtown, with dark glasses on and a battered tin cup in front of him. They'd both passed him several times, though, and given him pennies, both unable to penetrate the clever disguise. It was all kept, the disguise, in a free locker at the railroad terminal.

"Here he comes again, that loony!" Mrs. Santucci wailed.

Soon it was time to plant the seeds, and Mr. Aorta went about this with ponderous precision, after having consulted numerous books at the library. Neat rows of summer squash were sown in the richly dark soil; and peas, corn, beans, onions, beets, rhubarb, asparagus, water cress and much more, actually. When the rows were filled and Mr. Aorta was stuck with extra packs, he smiled and dispersed strawberry seeds and watermelon seeds and seeds without clear description. Shortly the paper packages were all empty.

A few days passed and it was getting time to go to the cemetery again for a fresh load, when Mr. Aorta noticed an odd thing.

The dark ground had begun to yield to tiny eruptions. Closer inspection revealed that things had begun to grow. In the soil.

Now Mr. Aorta knew very little about gardening, when you got right down to it. He thought it strange, of course, but he was not alarmed. He saw things growing, that was the important point. Things that would become food.

Praising his *Weltanschauung*, he hurried to Lilyvale and there received a singular disappointment: Not many people had died lately. There was scant dirt to be had: hardly one truckful.

Ah well, he thought, things are bound to pick up over the holidays; and he took home what there was.

Its addition marked the improvement of the garden's growth. Shoots and buds came higher, and the expanse was far less bleak.

He could not contain himself until the next Saturday, for obviously this dirt was acting as some sort of fertilizer on his plants — the free food called out for more.

But the next Saturday came a cropper. Not even a shovel's load. And the garden was beginning to dessicate. . . .

Mr. Aorta's startling decision came as a result of trying all kinds of new dirt and fertilizers of every imagin-

able description. Nothing worked. His garden, which had promised a full bounty of edibles, had sunk to new lows: it was almost back to its original state. And this Mr. Aorta could not abide, for he had put in considerable labor on the project and this labor must not be wasted. It had deeply affected his other enterprises.

So, with the caution born of desperation, he entered the gray quiet place with the tombstones one night, located freshly dug but unoccupied graves and added to their six-foot depth yet another foot. It was not noticeable to anyone who was not looking for such a discrepancy.

No need to mention the many trips involved: it is enough to say that in time Mr. Santucci's truck, parked a block away, was a quarter filled.

The following morning saw a rebirth in the garden.

And so it went. When dirt was to be had, Mr. Aorta was obliged; when it was not, well, it wasn't missed. And the garden kept growing and growing, until —

As if overnight, everything opened up! Where so short a time past had been a parched little prairie was now a multifloral, multivegetable paradise. Corn bulged yellow from its spiny green husks; peas were brilliant green in their half-split pods, and all the other wonderful foodstuffs glowed full rich with life and showcase vigor. Rows and rows of them.

Mr. Aorta was almost felled by enthusiasm.

A liver for the moment and an idiot in the art of canning, he knew what he had to do.

It took a while to systematically gather up the morsels; but with patience, he at last had the garden stripped clean of all but weeds and leaves and other unedibles.

He cleaned. He peeled. He stringed. He cooked. He boiled. He took all the good free food and piled it geometrically on tables and chairs and continued with this until it was all ready to be eaten.

Then he began. Starting with the asparagus — he had decided to do it in alphabetical order — he ate and ate clear through beets and celery and parsley and rhubarb, paused there for a drink of water, and went on eating, being careful not to waste a jot, until he came to water cress. By this time his stomach was twisting painfully, but it was a sweet pain, so he took a deep breath and, by chewing slowly, did away with the final vestigial bit of food.

The plates sparkled white, like a series of bloated snowflakes. It was all gone.

Mr. Aorta felt an almost sexual satisfaction, by which is meant he had had enough for now. He couldn't even belch.

Happy thoughts assailed his mind, as follows: His two greatest passions had been fulfilled; life's meaning acted out symbolically like a condensed Everyman. These two things

only are what this man thought of.

He chanced to look out the window.

What he saw was a speck of bright in the middle of blackness. Small, somewhere at the end of the garden — faint yet distinct.

With the effort of a brontosaurus emerging from a tar-pit Mr. Aorta rose from his chair, walked to the door and went out into his emasculated garden. He lumbered past dangling grotesqueries formed by shucks and husks and vines.

The speck seemed to have disappeared, and he looked carefully in all directions, slitting his eyes, trying to get accustomed to the moonlight.

Then he saw it. A white fronded thing, a plant, perhaps only a flower; but there, certainly, and all that was left.

Mr. Aorta was surprised to see that it was located at the bottom of a shallow declivity very near the dead tree. He couldn't remember how a hole could have got dug in his garden, but there were always neighborhood kids and their pranks. A lucky thing he'd grabbed the food when he did!

Mr. Aorta leaned over the edge of the small pit and reached down his hand toward the shining plant. It resisted his touch, somehow. He leaned farther over and yet a little farther, and still he couldn't lay fingers on the thing.

Mr. Aorta was not an agile man. However, with the intensity of a painter trying to cover one last tiny

spot awkwardly placed, he leaned just a mite farther and *plosh!* he'd toppled over the edge and landed with a peculiarly subaqueous thud. A ridiculous damned bother — now he'd have to make a fool of himself clambering out again. But, the plant . . . He searched the floor of the pit, and searched it, and no plant could be found. Then he looked up and was appalled by two things: Number one, the pit had been deeper than he'd thought; Number two, the plant was waving in the wind above him, on the rim he had so recently occupied.

The pains in Mr. Aorta's stomach got progressively worse. Movement increased the pains. He began to feel an overwhelming pressure in his ribs. It was at the moment of his discovery that the top of the hole was up beyond his reach that he saw the white plant in full moon glow. It looked rather like a hand, a big human hand, waxy and stiff and attached to the earth. The wind hit it and it moved slightly, causing a rain of dirt pellets to fall upon Mr. Aorta's face.

He thought a moment, judged the whole situation, and began to climb. But the pains were too much and he fell, writhing a bit.

The wind came again and more dirt was scattered down into the hole: soon the strange plant was being pushed to and fro against the soil, and the dirt fell more and more heavily. More and more. More heavily and more heavily.

Mr. Aorta, who had never up to this point found occasion to scream, screamed. It was quite successful, despite the fact that no one heard it.

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph William Santucci found Mr. Aorta. He was lying on the floor in front of several tables. On the tables were many plates. The plates on the tables were clean and shining.

His stomach was distended past burst belt buckle, popped buttons and forced zipper. It was not unlike the image of a great white whale rising from placid forlorn waters.

"Ate hisself to death," Mrs. Santucci said in the manner of the concluding line of a complex joke.

Mr. Santucci reached down and plucked a tiny ball of soil from the fat man's dead lips. He studied it. And an idea came to him. . . .

He tried to get rid of the idea, but when the doctors found Mr. Aorta's stomach to contain many pounds of dirt — and nothing else — Mr. Santucci slept badly, for almost a week.

They carried Mr. Aorta's body through the weedy but otherwise empty and desolate back yard, past the mournful dead tree and the rock fence.

And then they laid him to rest in a place with a moldering green woodboard wall: The wall had a little sign nailed to it, artlessly lettered though spelled correctly enough.

And the wind blew absolutely Free.

Here is a pleasingly mad little caprice, in which Mr. Dickson (with an assist from Mr. Milne) illuminates for us the Galactic Significance of the Snail.

James

by GORDON R. DICKSON

"James gave the huffle of a snail in danger. . . ."

(from "Four Friends," a poem by A. A. Milne)

JAMES HUFFLED.

He paused, his horns searching the air. Something was coming toward him along the brick he himself was traversing. For a moment he tensed, then his trained perception recognised that the one approaching was another snail. James glowed with pleasure and hurried to meet him.

"I'm James," he said, joyfully touching horns. "And you?"

"Egbert," replied the other. "Honored to make your acquaintance, James."

"Honored to make yours," replied James; and then, avidly, as all snails do, he asked, "What's new?"

"The word," said the other. "The word is being passed."

"No!" said James.

"Absolutely," confirmed Egbert. "It's Homo Sapiens, of course; you might have expected it." He sighed.

"H. Sapiens?" asked James. "Why, I wouldn't have thought it of them. They seemed like such large harmless creatures, for all their rushing around. I've just been observing one —"

"They may look harmless," interrupted Egbert, sternly, "but the mischief's in them. And we can't tolerate it, of course. After coming halfway across the Galaxy to try and get away from *Them*, you know."

"True," agreed James. He added, a trifle wistfully, "Sometimes I think we should have crushed *Them* the last time they overran the planet we were on. If not the previous time. Or the time before that."

"But what a labor it would have been," protested Egbert. "Of course all they had were primitive material weapons: space warps, disintegrators and the like. But there were so many of *Them* — thousands of planetary systems all populated up to the plimsoll mark. What a weary task to zzitz hard enough to exterminate them all. And how easy,

comparatively, to zzitz just enough to protect ourselves."

"Ah, yes," sighed James. "Of course we are by nature sensible and wary of overexertion. Well, I suppose we're better off here after all, even with Homo Sapiens dashing back and forth as if his shell was on fire. Who would ever have thought a life form could become so active? And what is it, by the way, that they've finally done?"

"Well," said Egbert darkly, "brace yourself. It's almost unbelievable, but since it comes through the grapevine, it must be true. The official word just filtered up from the valley of the Euphrates, or the Nile, or someplace around there. One of them—" he spaced the words slowly and impressively "—one—of—them has actually just invented a wheel!"

"No!" cried James, stunned.

"That's the word," insisted Egbert. "I don't blame you for being surprised. I had trouble believing it myself when it was told to me just the month before last."

"That explains it!" cried James. "I thought I'd been seeing things with wheels around; but naturally I couldn't believe my senses on the basis of purely empirical evidence. An old friend of mine was crushed by one the other day. His name was Charlie. You didn't know him, by any chance?"

"No," replied Egbert. "I never knew a Charlie." They brooded in silence for a second.

"He was a Good Snail," said James, at last, bestowing the words of highest tribute upon his deceased friend. His mind swung back to the implications of the news he had just heard. "But this—" he stammered, "—this is terrible!"

"Of course it is," brooded Egbert, darkly. "You know what's bound to happen now, don't you? They'll be settling down, making pottery. First thing you know they'll build pyramids, discover gunpowder. Why, before we can turn around they'll be splitting the atom, and you know what happens then!"

"Spaceflight . . ." breathed James, horrified.

"Exactly!" replied Egbert grimly. "And the minute they get a ship outside the atmosphere, it'll register on *Their* separation-index. And you know what *They*'ll do when *They* find out."

"Poor H. Sapiens!" quavered James.

"Yes," said Egbert. "And poor us. The minute a ship gets outside the Earth's atmosphere, it won't be more than three days, local time, before *They* notice it and have a fleet here englobing the planet. Which means we have only the limited time remaining between now and the launching of the first space rocket to take defensive measures. And that time gets shorter by the century. Why, for all we know—at the mad pace these humans move—one of them may be experimenting with a potter's wheel even now."

"Indeed," said James, anxiously, "I could almost swear I've noticed signs of pottery culture among our local H. Sapiens. Of course—" he added hastily—"I have no confirmation of the fact in the way of comparative reports from other Snails."

"True. I too . . ." Egbert lowered his voice. "Let us speak off the record, James. Unscientific as it must be for only two observers to compare notes—tell me: You haven't seen any evidence of pyramid building here in North America?"

"N-no . . ." answered James cautiously. "I *have* seen some rather odd structures—but no true pyramid."

"Thank heaven for that," said Egbert, with a sigh of relief. "Nor have I. Not that our two unofficial observations mean anything, but they represent a straw in the wind, a hope, James, that what you and I have seen mirrors the Big Picture, and that H. Sapiens is still, essentially, a happy herdsman."

"Still," said James doubtfully, "if I were to venture a guess on my own—"

"James!" reproved Egbert, shocked. "This is unsnaillike. Put such thoughts from your mind. No, no, rest assured that we have some few thousands of years still in which to contact H. Sapiens if the race is to be taught how to zzitz and so protect itself and its planet from *Them*. Reassure yourself that it is merely a matter of contacting the right individual, one who will be-

lieve us and who in turn will be believed by his fellows."

For a moment silence hung heavy between the two snails.

"Some people," said James finally, in an apologetic voice, "might call us slow."

"Oh, no!" cried Egbert, profoundly shocked. "Surely not!"

"And perhaps," continued James, his voice strengthening, "who knows but what we actually may be a bit slow? I want to be fair about this. I *will* be fair about this! Think, Egbert: it has been at least twenty planets, one after the other, which we have seen blown from beneath us, and their native life destroyed by *Them* in spite of all our good intentions about teaching that native life to protect itself by zzitzing."

"But—"

"But me no buts, Egbert! Twenty chances we have had to protect the weak and defenseless. Twenty times—in a row—we have been just a little bit late in giving aid. And I say to you, Egbert, here and now, that if by following our traditional cautious methods we again slip up and see the human race destroyed, then, by all that's holy, we *are* a trifle slow!"

"James," breathed Egbert, shrinking back in awe. "Such energy! Such fire! You are a Snail Transformed!"

And, indeed, James was. Quivering with righteous indignation, he had reared up a full three-quarters of an inch above the surface of the

brick and both sets of his horns stuck out rigidly, as if challenging the universe.

"Egbert," he said fiercely, "the tradition of cons is about to be broken. You have spoken of several thousand years in which to contact H. Sapiens. Know, Egbert, that the far end of this brick touches the sill of a window, that that sill overhangs a desk, and that at that desk sits a man high in the councils of the Five Indian Nations, or the United Nations, or some such important organization. This man I have been observing and I have discovered in him the capability to understand and believe the threat that *They* will pose to his race, if that self-same race continues this mad plunge of progress which has just recently brought forth the invention of the wheel."

"James!" gasped Egbert. "You mean . . .? You wouldn't . . .? Not without first submitting a report for the consideration of other snails, the formation of an investigative forum, the collection of an adequate number of blanketing reports, a general referendum —"

"Cease, Egbert!" interrupted James sternly. "I would, and I will. What you and other snails have always refused to recognise is the impermanence of the individual H. Sapiens. They are here today, and — if I may coin a phrase — gone tomorrow." The tone of his voice changed. A note almost of pleading crept into it. "Can't you under-

stand, Egbert, that this is a crisis! We can't afford to waste a thousand years here and a thousand years there just to make the matter official."

"But scientific method —" began Egbert.

"Scientific method, bosh!" retorted James, crudely. Egbert gasped. "What good was scientific method to the life forms of the last twenty planets we've inhabited?"

Egbert was struck dumb. It was a good twenty minutes before he managed to answer.

"Why —" he said at last. "I never thought of that. That's true, it didn't help them much, did it?" He stared at James with wonder and admiration dawning in the little eye at the tip of each of his two major horns. "But James —" he said. "To flout tradition in this fashion — to throw off at one fell swoop the age-welded bonds of ancient custom and established means. Why, James —" he went on, falling, as all Snails do when deeply moved, into iambic pentameter — "this step will sound throughout the halls of time; and through the echoing vault of universe; be duplicated to infinity. So that all future ages, hearing it, and looking back, will wonder how you could. And tell me James, how is it that you can?"

James bowed his horns in graceful acknowledgment of the question.

"I am," he replied simply, "what you might possibly characterize as a humanitarian."

"Ah," said Egbert softly, "so that's it."

"Yes," answered James. "And now — my duty calls. Farewell, Egbert."

"Farewell!" choked Egbert, almost too overcome to speak. They broke contact; and James began to turn around. "Farewell, oh *brave* and *gallant* spirit!"

Resolutely, James completed his turn and began his march. Inside the window, at the desk, a heavy balding man with tired eyes straightened his glasses and began to read a report stamped TOP SECRET and headed PARTICULARS OF FORTHCOMING FLIGHT OF UN SPACE ROCKET X-1. He read steadily into the report as the sun crept across the sky.

After a while he stopped temporarily to rub his eyes. As he did,

he caught sight of a snail which had just crawled across the sill from outside the window. It stood balanced on the edge. It was James, of course, and for a long second they looked at each other. Then the man turned back to the report.

James paused to catch his breath. The trip had been all of eleven inches and he had come at top speed.

Finally he collected himself and turned toward the man. The H. Sapiens' head was bent over a sheaf of paper; but whatever engrossed him there would be small potatoes to what James was about to hit him with. James took a deep breath.

"Huffle," he said. "Huffle. *Huffle! Huffle, huffle, huffle, huffle . . .*"

"James gave the huffle of a snail in danger — And nobody heard him at all."
A. A. Milne

ADVANCE NOTICE

It's a little early to tell you many details about the Thirteenth World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in Cleveland at the Manger Hotel from September 2 through September 5. But three points should be enough to make you send off your check immediately: 1) the guest of honor will be Isaac Asimov, who is (I solemnly assure you) even more entertaining in person than on the printed page; 2) this convention will, uniquely, take over almost an entire hotel for its own use, with no house detectives and night managers to worry about; 3) *conventions are fun!* So, to help the Clevelanders through the difficult early months of arrangements, please send your \$2 registration at once to 13th World S. F. Convention, Box 508, Edgewater Branch, Cleveland 7, Ohio. See you in September!

FOOTNOTE ON A COLLABORATION: *More often than readers suspect, a story carrying a solo by-line has been so extensively replotted and even rewritten by the editor that it is actually a collaboration. (In F&SF any such revisions are always undertaken only with the approval of the author; in one of our leading rivals, I am told, the printed form of a story is often a complete surprise to its nominal creator.)* I know, for instance, that many of my own stories anthologized from Astounding should, if I were a wholly scrupulous man, bear the credit-line "by Anthony Boucher and John W. Campbell, Jr." Miriam Allen deFord is, I have discovered, a singularly scrupulous woman; after this story passed back and forth between us a number of times, she decided that it should carry a collaborative by-line. I hope you like the result.

Mary Celestial

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD AND
ANTHONY BOUCHER

XILMUCH WAS DISCOVERED — ONCE. It was discovered in 3942 by Patrick Ostronsky-Vierra, a Two Star Scout of the Galactic Presidium.

It is easy to find — it is in fact Planet IV of Altair. If it were not a little off the beaten track it would have been discovered long before. It is almost precisely the size of our Earth, has similar atmosphere, rotation, gravity, and climatic conditions. It is two-thirds land surface, and in every way is admirably adapted to human habitation. It has been the home of beings indistinguishable from humans, and was once the seat of a high civiliza-

tion very like our own of the 40th century, except in minor details. There are no noxious animal forms (the only beasts are herbivorous and inoffensive), and there are no human inhabitants who would resist colonization.

And yet, no matter how overcrowded the colonized planets may become, Xilmuch (that was its name in the dominant native language) will never be discovered again. It will never be colonized.

Not after the report Patrick Ostronsky-Vierra brought back in 3942.

He landed in what seemed to be

its largest city, after a preliminary survey of the entire planet in his little one-man scout ship. There was a beautiful airport, equipped for planes of every description. It was not in good repair. Squirrel-like animals infested the hangars full of grounded atmosphere-ships. Grass was growing between cracks in the wide runways. A storm had leveled what had been a huge neo-neon beacon.

Patrick spent two days exploring the city on foot. There were multitudes of parked surface cars and of helicopter-like planes, some of which had crashed and were piles of junk. All had been propelled by some fuel unknown to him, all the tanks were empty, and he could not find any stores of fuel that he could recognize. A good many of the main streets had moving sidewalks under plastic roofs, and some were still operating by remote control. It was the sort of civilization which in his experience implied the services of robots, but no robots of any kind were visible.

He explored systematically, starting at one end of the city and circling closer and closer to the center, which appeared to be a huge civic or control area, with overgrown parks, large imposing buildings, and a forest of tri-dimensional televiz masts. The city itself stood on the banks of a wide river, an arm of which had been diverted to run in a circle around this Civic Center, with numerous bridges between.

He went in and out of private houses, what seemed to be hotels, stores, warehouses, schools, halls, factories, and one building apparently a center of worship. Not one solitary human being met him, nor any other living creature higher in the scale of evolution than the equivalent of a cow. The cow-like creatures were not abundant, but they looked well fed; apparently they browsed on the vegetation of the many parks and gardens. It was unthinkable that they could be the dominant race. This civilization had been built by animals with developed cortices and opposable thumbs.

The planet was as advanced artistically as it was scientifically. In the homes, under thick layers of dust, were delicate jewels and piles of beautiful thin coins engraved in strange designs. The walls of the larger buildings were all carved in bas-relief, in a manner nearer to ancient Mayan art than to any other Patrick knew. Demonology must have played a large part in the religion, for there were numerous carvings of small winged beings with long Grecoesque features and what looked like lightning-bolts for arms and legs. In the temple, a grotesque and horrible statue, a hundred feet high, filled most of the great nave.

There were no libraries or museums, no books, no paintings, no musical instruments, no microfilm. Yet the inhabitants must have had some means of visual and auditory

public communication, judging by the televiz masts at the Civic Center.

Patrick camped for his first two nights in the nearest house, spreading his blanket on a rug because the beds were too thick in dust. He had his own food supplies in a knapsack, but the stores were full of shelves of metal containers obviously (though he could not understand the drawings on the labels) with edible contents. He sampled one or two, after testing them for harmlessness, and found one to be a preserved fruit with a pleasant subacid flavor, another a sort of paste resembling *pâté de foie gras* mixed with caviar. There was also a pale pink liquid in a plastic bottle which turned out to be a delicate wine somewhat like *vin rosé*.

He felt like a cross between Goldilocks and Alice.

On the third day he passed over a bridge to the Civic Center. The buildings in their disheveled parks were grouped around a spreading stone edifice with a dome, which he took to be the City Hall. It was morning, a beautiful sunny summer day in the bluish whiteness of Altair. The ragged trees, something like oaks, were full of white and green birds, all singing their little hearts out. A metal fountain, carved in the likeness of a spreading tree, was spouting water from the tips of its branches into a little pond. The grass was covered with myriads of low-growing, velvety purple flowers

run wild. Patrick took the broad road, whose ornamental green and brown tiles showed wide gaps through which grassy blades grew thickly, that led to the central building. A long flight of steps ended at a massive bronze-like door, heavily and intricately carved.

Before his eyes, the door opened. A man stood for a second in the doorway, then dashed down the steps toward him.

Patrick braced himself and reached for his raygun. But the man's arms were opened wide, his mouth was stretched in an ecstatic smile, and tears were running down his cheeks.

He was a tall, burly man, seemingly in late middle age; his hair was white but his movements were lithe and supple. He was clean-shaven, and was dressed in a sort of overall made of a grey fabric which looked both soft and durable. He called out something in a harsh guttural tongue. The scout shook his head.

"Welcome, welcome to Xilmuch!" cried the man then in perfect Standard Galactic. "Who are you? How did you get here? Where are you from? I was never so glad to see anyone in all my life!"

He gave Patrick no time to answer. Seizing him by the arm, he hustled him inside.

It had been an official building all right, Patrick could see that. There was a great lobby rising unimpeded to the dome, with an enormous wasteful central staircase.

There were banks of levescalators on either side, and wide hallways led to ground-floor offices with transparent plastic doors running from floor to ceiling.

But half the rooms to the right had been transformed into a dwelling place. Patrick was hurried into a living-room whose stone floors were covered with thick grey rugs into which his boots sank. There were couches and low chairs, heavy cream-colored curtains at all the tall windows, long tables of a dark gleaming wood, their legs carved in flowers and birds.

An inner door opened, revealing a corner of a white shining room that must be a kitchen. A woman burst through it and ran to them.

She was about as old as the man, sturdy also, but too plump, with grey hair elaborately curled. She too was dressed in an overall, but hers was bright purple and over it she wore a fancy apron of lace with pink bows at its corners. She had been pretty once, in a vapid way — probably a piquant blonde of the buttercup-and-daisy variety.

She burst into excited chatter in the unknown tongue, clutching at the man's hand. Her voice was high and twittering, with a whine beneath it. The man answered her, and though Patrick could not understand the words, the contemptuous tone was clear enough. The scolding ran off her like water; she gazed at the man meltingly, then turned to stare angrily at the Terran.

The man disengaged himself from her. In Galactic he said to the scout: "Oh, this is wonderful! A visitor — a visitor at last!

"We must celebrate. We will have a feast. The last case of *rexshan* I could find — I must open it now. Tell me what you want: if there is any of it left, it is yours.

"Oh, what a miracle! Somebody to talk to after so terribly long!"

The woman had sidled up and cuddled against the man, holding his hand to her cheek. He jerked away impatiently, and barked what must have been an order, for she nodded brightly and trotted back to the kitchen, throwing a kiss as she went. The man shrugged as if throwing off a weight and turned to Patrick with undisguised relief.

"Sit here," he said. "It is the most comfortable. And now tell me who you are, my friend, and how you found me."

Patrick showed his credentials. The stranger shook his head. He explained them in words. The man nodded sagely.

"I understand. I had never dared to hope for a visitor from beyond Xilmuch. But I have heard of space travel, though we never attained it."

"And yet you speak Galactic."

"Is that what it is? That is one of my — But tell me first —"

"No, *you* tell *me*. Who are you? What happened to this city? Why did I see nobody in three days, until I found you and — and the lady? Is all your world like this?"

"My name is Zoth — Zoth Cheruk, but you must call me Zoth, and I shall call you Patrick. All the rest you ask — I shall be glad to tell you everything, but we have plenty of time. We'll talk and talk! But first I want to know all about *you*, your world, how you all live, your own life — everything. I have been so starved for conversation — you can't imagine how much, or how long!"

"But oughtn't we to be helping the lady?" Patrick asked uneasily.

"Her name is Jyk. She is my wife." He scowled. "She can manage. She cooks well, at least. It will take her hours; I have ordered all the best for us. Meanwhile, we will drink while we wait."

He opened a tall cabinet with carved doors and took out goblets and a squat yellow bottle.

"Not *rexshan* — we shall have that at dinner. But almost as good; it is pure *stralp* of a very good year."

He poured an iridescent liquid.

"You smell it for a few minutes, then you sip, then you smell it again," he explained.

"Like brandy," Patrick agreed.

"That I do not know. But that is as good a place to start as any. Tell me of your foods and drinks."

There was no help for it. This guy was going to give in his own good time only. Planet scouts are trained in diplomacy. Patrick settled down to being a vocal encyclopedia attached to a question-machine.

Twice they were interrupted by calls from the kitchen. Each time Zoth rose reluctantly and went out, first replenishing Patrick's goblet; he could be heard lifting and setting down some heavy object, his annoyed voice interrupted by his wife's cooing tones. The relation between the two puzzled Patrick as much as anything else he had chanced upon in this strange world, this seeming *Mary Celeste* of the space-seas.

Several hours and several glasses of the iridescent *stralp* later, he was feeling only relaxed and very hungry. Zoth's wife appeared in the kitchen door, rosy and dimpling. This time Zoth beamed. "Now we shall eat," he said. "We are having a tender young *ekahir* I had been saving in the freezing-box. I shall bring it in."

Jyk — what ought he to call her? Mrs. Cheruk? — cleared one of the long tables and from the lower part of the cabinet took dishes of some transparent plastic, golden yellow and delicately etched. She drew from a drawer knives and spoons — there were no forks — of a metal that looked like steel. Patrick hurried to help her. Her manner was distraught, and she kept glancing yearningly toward the kitchen. Presently Zoth entered, bearing a large tray heaped with steaming food.

The *ekahir* turned out to be a crisply roasted bird, its flesh tasting like a combination of turkey and

duck. Zoth carved it adroitly, using a long thin knife with a carved metal handle, while his wife piled the plates high with unknown but interesting-looking vegetables. The *rexshan*, poured into tall slender glasses, proved to be a cool bubbling wine, with a warm aftertaste and an insidious effect.

The food was delicious, the drink delightful, and the Terran's appetite sharp; but after his first hunger was satisfied, Patrick found himself increasingly disquieted.

Something he could not understand was very wrong between these two. He didn't need to comprehend the words they exchanged to realize that Zoth loathed his wife, and that she worshiped him. There was scorn in every harsh command he gave her, and to each she hastened to respond with servile promptness. It got on Patrick's nerves, until at last Zoth himself noticed, and made an obvious effort to restrain himself.

The climax came when Jyk, watching her husband's plate with anxious solicitude, suddenly jumped from her seat, carried a dish of tart blue jelly to Zoth's place, placed a portion of it on his plate, and caressingly threw her other arm around his neck just as he was raising a spoonful of *ekahir* to his mouth.

The meat fell from his jostled arm to the table, and he leapt to his feet. The angry syllables he shouted were unmistakably a curse.

Then suddenly, before Patrick could take in what was happening,

Zoth seized the long knife with which he had carved the bird — and plunged it full into his wife's breast.

Patrick dived and caught him by the arm before he could strike again. Shaking with horror, he turned his eyes to the victim.

She was not dead, she had not fallen, she was not even bleeding. With a gay laugh she plucked the knife from her flesh, chirped a few words in a tone of affectionate teasing, patted her husband's cheek, and returned amiably to her place at the foot of the table, where she calmly helped herself to more of the jelly.

Patrick's hand fell. He stood staring in paralyzed astonishment. Zoth laughed then too — but his laugh was half a groan.

"Forgive me for interrupting our meal so impolitely, my friend," he said. "Sometimes this woman exasperates me beyond endurance — but, as you see, it does her no harm."

Patrick could only continue to stare, as he slowly resumed his seat.

As for Jyk, she sat drinking *rekshan*, and smiling at her husband as a mother smiles at her naughty child.

Patrick's appetite was gone; he sat uncomfortably waiting for an explanation that did not come. Zoth cleaned the last scrap from his plate, drained the last drop of *rexshan*, and only then addressed a few curt remarks to his wife. She rose quickly and began removing the dishes. The host turned to his guest.

"Exercise is good after a full

meal, Patrick. Let us walk for a while around the city, and I will show you how I get our food and all our supplies. There is still much I have not yet asked you about your world."

"There is much I want to know also, Zoth," the Terran reminded him.

"Later; there is no hurry. When it is dark I shall send the woman off to bed alone, and then we shall sit over glasses of *stralp* and you may ask me anything you wish to know. But now you must tell me more of this Galactic Presidium, and how it operates. You say there is an agreement by which hitherto undiscovered planets are opened for colonization by whatever life-form is best adapted to them? You may imagine how much this interests me, since I can detect no difference whatever between your form and mine — we are *akkir* together."

"*Akkir* — that means human?"

"Yes. And here is a whole empty world, with all the foundations of civilization already laid."

"I am only a scout, you understand," said Patrick. "I have no authority."

"I understand. But your recommendation would have great influence. I am only wondering how long it would take. Perhaps it would be better . . . However, all that we can discuss later. Now I want to ask you —"

Patrick turned again into a vocal encyclopedia.

Their walk took them to a large warehouse. Zoth opened the door.

"Here, you see," he explained, "are stored garments made of furs — furs of the carnivorous animals which no longer exist on Xilmuch. When it is cold, and we need warm clothing, we have only to take our pick. In the same way, all the stores and warehouses of the city are open to us to obtain whatever we desire in the way of food, clothes, furniture, ornaments — anything at all. There is only one real scarcity: *rhaz*, the fuel by which we run our planes and cars. I have stored all of that I could find in our house, which was once the City Hall, and I use a vehicle only when it is necessary to carry heavy loads. Otherwise, I walk. One man cannot operate the *rhaz* supplier, though when mine is gone I shall have to find some way."

"What about public utilities?" Patrick asked. "Water, lights, things like that?"

"Enough is still operating automatically to serve us. Much, of course, has failed. If, before I — if we of Xilmuch had only learned to split the atom, as you say your world has done — But we hadn't, and so, you will understand, there is great deterioration in such things, though they could be easily rehabilitated with sufficient manpower. After all, it has been fifty years."

"Fifty years since what?"

"Shall we turn back now? I don't want to tire you, and the sun will

be setting soon. There are no street lights any more, and I shouldn't like you to stumble in our ruts and gullies in the darkness. Besides, I'm thirsty again, and so must you be. The woman will have finished cleaning up; I shall have her set out some refreshment for us and send her off."

They had walked farther than Patrick had realized; it was twilight before they crossed the bridge to the Civic Center where the great dome dominated the skyline. A glow of lights came from the right-hand windows on the first floor, and as they mounted the steps they found Jyk pacing up and down before the bronze door.

As soon as she glimpsed them, she ran toward them and threw her arms around her husband with a babble of speech. Zoth pulled away impatiently.

"The fool thought she had lost me," he said with a wry grin. "This is the first time I have been this long out of her sight in 50 years. She insists on following me everywhere I go, and it's not worth the trouble to get rid of her when I have no other companion — but today, when I have you — today I ordered her to stay at home and leave me free. She has been weeping. I am glad of it. Let her weep."

Pretty cool, thought Patrick, for a man who had just tried to murder his wife in cold blood, and had failed to do so only by a miracle!

The big municipal-office-turned-living-room was aglow with tubes of

soft neo-neon light, and he sank wearily into one of the soft chairs. The cream-colored curtains were drawn, but through a gap he could see the dark sky. This world, he had found, had no moon; and since the city lay near the equator, twilight and dawn were very brief.

He could have done with some sleep; but after all, a scout is a sort of diplomat: if his host were looking forward to a long evening, there was nothing to do but acquiesce. Besides, curiosity was scratching at him; he could make nothing at all of the personal situation here, and it was time for Zoth to talk.

Zoth addressed his wife in a series of staccato remarks. She bustled obediently into the kitchen, while her husband laid out the goblets and fresh bottles of the *stralp*. In a few minutes she returned, bearing a plate heaped with strips of some crisp white substance glistening with what looked like salt. She threw her arms around her husband's neck, and, standing on tiptoe, pressed kisses on his unresponsive face. Patrick looked about him nervously, but this time Zoth stood uncomplainingly like a statue, his fists clenched. He said a few curt words, and Jyk disentangled herself and with a rebellious pout bowed unsmilingly to Patrick, making no attempt to dissemble her jealousy. She departed slowly through another door.

"Ah!" said the host, stretching luxuriously. "She will not dare to

trouble us again tonight." He poured the glasses full. "You cannot imagine what this means to me! At last — an evening of social conversation with a congenial friend! I have waited so long — I had almost ceased to hope."

"I think it is your turn to talk now," said the scout coldly.

"I know. You are right. And I can see that you are displeased with me. You think me rude and brutal, you think I abuse a poor woman whose only fault is that she adores me too much. But when you have heard —"

"You tried to kill her, at dinner."

"Precisely: she angered me beyond endurance . . . and I *tried*. You observed that I did not succeed."

Patrick recovered his aplomb.

"I apologize," he said. "It is not my business to judge what I cannot understand. But you will realize I must be puzzled."

"I do indeed. And you are my friend — my first friend in fifty years. I will tell you everything you want to know. Only, it is hard to know how to start.

"Tell me: in your world, are there . . . beings . . . persons that are not human?"

Patrick smiled indulgently. "Some people in my world believe so. Everybody believed so once."

"Here also. Only, I have proved that they are real."

Oh, come now! Patrick thought. *Fairy tales at this point?* "You have?"

he said in his best diplomatic manner.

"As you see about you . . . Then, have you a story that one may force such a being to do one's will?"

"We do have a myth — a symbol which has inspired some of our greatest artists — about selling one's soul to the devil —"

"Oh, as with the Nameless!" Zoth turned pale and raised his arms high, the thumbs and forefingers firmly pressed together. "Do not speak of Him!"

Patrick remembered the terrifying hundred-foot statue in the nave of the great temple. Unreasoningly, he knew that this was the Nameless; and for a moment he felt less scornful of the fairy tale.

"No," Zoth went on; "what I mean is closer to the simple *akkir* plane. These are lesser beings, but powerful enough. If one of them can be brought into your power, he can be compelled to grant you five wishes. You have such?"

"Fairies, leprechauns, demons . . . I see what you mean. But on Earth it is, according to legend, only three wishes that he grants."

"You are luckier than we."

So Zoth's Standard Galactic, the scout thought with amusement, was not so altogether perfect as he had assumed — *luckier* when he meant *less lucky*. Patrick hid a smile as Zoth refilled their goblets.

"I shall tell you the whole story. It is the easiest way to make it clear."

... if not necessarily convincing Patrick thought. And yet, he asked himself, *have you, my bright Galactic scout, found any normal rational method of accounting for this deserted planet, this celestial Mary Celeste?*

"Fifty years ago I was 23 years old. You look surprised. I can age like other *akkir*, but I can never be senile.

"I was young. I was poor. I had a mean job I hated. I was lonely, with no close friends — I, so gregarious a man — and I was madly in love with a girl who would not even look at me. I was in despair.

"How the *grosh* was summoned to me and how he came under my power I shall not tell you. It would be too hard to make it plain, and besides, these are secret things better not told. But he came, and I did subdue him to my will."

"The *grosh* — that's the demon?"

"You may call him so; he is in any event a being like neither you nor me, nor any material creature. I may tell you that my own grandfather was a *vardun* — a priest in the great temple of the Nameless in this city — and from him, though I myself was not chosen to be a *vardun*, I had learned many things in my boyhood."

He repeated the propitiatory gesture — the arms raised and the thumbs and forefingers pressed together.

"So there I was, with five wishes at my disposal. Even then — though I never guessed —" Zoth shud-

dered — "I thought it wise not to use up all of them at once, but to keep one at least in reserve. You will see how wise that was — but still not wise enough."

"What does anyone want? Long life, health, wealth, love, fame perhaps, though that I did not care about: and if one's heart is good, one wants also good fortune for others as well. I was canny; I had speculated long, to get into small compass as much as possible of the things I craved and had never had."

"Understandably," Patrick nodded. "We are of different worlds, Zoth, but of the same nature."

"So I wished, first, to live to a hundred years at least, and always in good health and strength, without injury or illness. 'Granted,' said the *grosh*.

"Then I wished, not for great wealth which may be a burden, but that I should never lack for any comfort or luxury I might desire. And, since I am one who loves my fellow-beings, loves company and good talk — I, who for fifty years have spoken only to that silly creature in there! — I specified that among these comforts and luxuries must be the ability to converse freely with every person I ever met. You must realize that in Xilmuch at that time there were different communities, all equal, but speaking different tongues —"

"You mean, different nations?"

"Of course; that is your word for them. I intended to travel much,

and I wanted to be able to associate with all whom I met. So this, I stipulated, must be part of my second wish."

"So that's how you speak Standard Galactic, is it? That's puzzled me a lot."

"That is how. And if you had spoken any other language, I could have understood and spoken it just as well."

"And what was your third wish?" Patrick began to see a pattern forming — and wished that he did not.

Zoth paced the room, his glass of *stralp* in his hand. He glanced furtively at the door through which Jyk had vanished. Then he said in a shaking voice:

"I told the *grosh* — the Nameless forgive me! — that I wished that the girl with whom I was then so madly in love should love me in return, as madly and forever. I wished that she might be willing to marry me at once. And I wished that she should never leave me, but would live exactly as long as I did myself.

"And the *grosh* said, 'Granted.'"

"That's three wishes." Patrick hesitated. "Did you make any more?"

"One more. Do you know what a war is?"

"Certainly. It has been centuries since there has been a war on Earth, but in the past they were only too common. Even now, we must guard vigilantly against hostility and conflict between rival groups."

"We had not progressed so far. At one time or another, all of our various — nations, as you call them, on Xilmuch had been at one another's throats. We had torn one another almost to pieces, and as our science advanced our wars grew still more terrible. And at that very moment there was threat of a new war that would have advanced my own people, here in this city.

"I was an idealistic young man, who hated bloodshed. So for my fourth wish, I wished that everywhere on Xilmuch there should be complete and perpetual peace.

"'Granted,' said the *grosh*."

"These were my four wishes. And I told the *grosh* that when I was ready to make the fifth, I would summon him: these beings are immortal, you know. I have still not made it."

"But I don't understand," Patrick objected. "It seems to me that those were all practicable wishes. And you say you had the — the *grosh* in your power. Didn't he really grant them?"

"He granted them all," said Zoth.

"As for the first, I am as you see me. I shall live at least 27 years more, and I shall never know illness or bodily pain. That wish I have no doubt the *grosh* granted me with pleasure — knowing that long before the end I should yearn in vain for death.

"And I have, as you observe, every comfort and luxury I could desire. I live in a palace, and I have

at my disposal the food, the clothing, the furniture, all the paraphernalia of life of a great city. The supply, easily obtained, will certainly outlast my lifetime. As for the ability to converse with my fellow-beings in their own tongues, it is only today that I have had occasion to test it — and that with an *akkir* from a world of outer space. But you see it was granted to me.”

“But the third wish? What went wrong about the girl you loved? How did the demon get out of really granting you that?”

“He didn’t. . . . It was Jyk.”

“Oh.”

“I had thought my heart was broken when she spurned every advance I made. Now of her own accord she came to me: she loved me wildly, as she always will. I was in ecstasy. We were married at once. I was the happiest man on Xilmuch.

“How could I foresee that my own love would turn to loathing? But against my will, it did: first she bored me, then she disgusted me, now I hate her with all my heart.

“And she will be with me all my life. She will live exactly as long as I.”

“So that’s why —” Patrick exclaimed.

“Yes, that is why no knife, nor any other means, can ever rid me of her.

“I am ashamed that you saw that scene; it does not happen often. But can you imagine what it must be like to have someone, someone you detest, pester you with constant

worship? Sometimes I think I shall go mad: nothing, nothing will ever offend or alienate her, and she clings to me every minute. I know she is not sleeping now; she will do whatever I tell her, but she is waiting for me right now with open arms; if I did not go to her eventually, she would seek me out, wherever I might be. And for fifty years there has been no *akkir* on Xilmuch but her and me!”

He paused, fighting for self-control.

“I don’t want you to think I am naturally cruel,” he went on in a calmer voice. “If I had pity left for anyone but myself, I should pity her. But I need not; she is happy just to be with me, however I treat her. Nearly always I can pretend patience. It was only today, when your coming had so excited me —”

The scout averted his eyes. Quickly, to change the subject, he asked:

“But your fourth wish? Did the demon grant you that?”

“Is there not peace on Xilmuch?” asked Zoth simply.

The Terran was silent. *Demons indeed! But this planet . . . the pattern . . .*

“Yes,” his host went on, “the *grosh* knew. We *akkir* are not made by nature for perpetual peace — or we were not so made fifty years ago. The animals also . . . There is no animal on this planet now which fights with others for its mate, or kills others for its food.

"And there is great and lasting and perpetual peace today on Xilmuch."

Patrick said nothing. His host filled their glasses.

Finally the Terran broke the silence.

"Is there no way," he said hesitantly, "by which, with the wisdom you have acquired, you could use the fifth wish still at your disposal to undo some of the evil the demon did you?"

You might wish, Patrick thought, to return your wife's love once more, and salvage that much out of the mess; but probably it's too late for that now.

Zoth shook his head.

"Do you think I haven't worn myself out trying to find some way? The truth is, Patrick, I've been afraid to wish again — afraid he will twist that also to his own evil advantage. And then I should be completely defenseless, at his mercy.

"It is only today, my friend, that a bit of hope has come to me. How could even a *grosh*, I wonder, spoil so modest a wish? It is little enough to ask — I've been so horribly lonely —"

He looked long and speculatively at the Terran.

Patrick drained the last of his *stralp* and stood up. He felt himself trembling.

"Zoth," he said apologetically, "I hate to break this up, but I'm afraid I'm asleep on my feet. Let's go to bed now, shall we? Tomorrow's another day."

"Oh, my friend, forgive me! Of course — you must be worn out! What a way to treat a guest — and a guest who means so much to me! You must excuse an old man who has half a century of conversation to make up! I'll show you where you are to sleep."

He led the way through still a third door to another huge room, a corner of which had been screened off to hold a low couch covered with some soft woolly fabric.

"My guestroom," he smiled. "You are the first ever to occupy it. I hope you will find it comfortable. Right through here you will find the toilet facilities. You turn the light off thus.

"Sleep well, my friend. I shall be sleeping late in the morning myself — I don't often keep such hours as this. When you wake, come to the living hall, and a meal will be ready for you."

Patrick was alone at last.

He made no attempt to undress or go to bed. He had brought his knapsack in with him, and he checked its contents. Then he sat quietly on the edge of the couch, thinking.

He sat there for two solid hours, until there was no glimmer of light anywhere and from a distant room came the sound of faint but steady snoring.

The tall windows opened outwards, and this was the ground floor. Outside, he put on his boots.

It was very dark. No one could

have seen him as he crept from tree to tree, in the shadow of the overgrown ornamental bushes, to the nearest bridge.

Once across, he set out at as rapid a pace as possible. Even so, it took three hours, and the sky was beginning to gray, before he reached his ship.

An hour later, well beyond the orbit of Xilmuch, he began to wonder if he had made a fool of himself.

. . . Who ever heard of the entire population of a planet's being wiped out, just to grant somebody's wish for worldwide peace? Space knew, there were enough other roads to devastation! Wasn't the reasonable conclusion that in some entirely natural way, some epidemic or other frightful catastrophe on Xilmuch, only this man and his wife had survived? Wouldn't it be logical that such a shock would have crazed them both? Hadn't he spent a day and a night listening to the tale of a lunatic?

It was obvious that the man was desperately lonely, and would have kept his chance guest just as long as he could; but did it make sense that he could have done so by merely uttering an unused wish? Wasn't Patrick Ostronsky-Vierra just as crazy as Zoth Cheruk to swallow such a story, even late at night and full of *rexshan* and *stralp*?

. . . But then why were there no carnivorous animals on Xilmuch, but plenty of herbivorous ones and every sort of vegetation? Catas-

trophes were not quite so selective as that.

And how . . . how else could Zoth have plunged a knife deep into his wife's breast — Patrick's horror-stricken eyes had seen the blade go in to the handle — and draw not a single drop of blood, elicit no sign of pain?

Xilmuch would be a wonderful planet for colonization. Its discovery would be the climax of his career as a scout; there would be no limit to his rise in the profession after that.

And how Zoth would welcome the colonists!

. . . And what unguessed harm he could do them unwittingly by that fifth wish of his!

In twenty-seven years or so Zoth and Jyk would both be dead. Zoth could do no harm then. But what would the Galactic Presidium think if a scout should announce that here was a perfect colonization-point — only it must not be approached while an old man was still alive who might jinx them?

And with or without Zoth, how about a planet evidently full of mischievous, rancorous, double-crossing *grosh*, with who knew what bags of tricks in their possession?

To say nothing of the Nameless, that distinctly unpretty god or devil whose image Patrick had seen for himself.

Patrick Ostronsky-Vierra, trusted and dedicated Two Star Scout, de-

cided deliberately to violate his sacred oath of office.

When he returned to the headquarters of the Galactic Presidium, his report read:

"I visited Planet IV of Altair, which has been hitherto undiscovered, and which on first approach appeared to be suitable for colonization. On further investigation I found that the atmosphere consists mostly of methane. The planet itself is still in a semi-molten state, with incessant volcanic eruptions and violent wind-storms of ethane gas.

"I advise that the planet be given a wide berth — permanently. It is completely unfit for human habitation."

But there was another report: a private one. It was found among Ostronsky-Vierra's effects after his death in 4009. It was in a plastic closure marked: *For the Sealed Files of the Galactic Presidium. To Be Opened 50 Years after Receipt.*

In it was this complete narrative as I, Mari Swenskold-Wong, Secre-

tary of the Presidium in this year 4060, read it to the entire Presidium at its meeting upon February 30.

We are still, as everyone knows, in great need of more living-space in the colonized planets. There has been much discussion of the possibility of colonizing Xilmuch, and there will be much more discussion, perhaps even insistence upon the part of the Opposition.

But the majority opinion, in which I concur, is that no foreseeable Galactic situation, even the mounting pressure of expansion, can justify sending colonists to what Ostronsky-Vierra justly labeled the *Mary Celeste* of space. Empty of Zoth Cheruk and his Jyk it must be by now, but not of its Nameless and its *grosh* (and who can say what powerful type of unknown life-form hides behind these supernatural masks?).

Superstitious, I hope I may safely say, we surely are not; but neither are we, in our Chairman's ringing words, "reckless damn fools." There are other worlds.



Recommended Reading

by THE EDITOR

ALL RIGHT, BOYS; LET'S FACE IT:
What science fiction boom?

For something over five years now we've been being told, in serious articles in learned journals, that s.f. is the great new American cultural phenomenon, that its devotees are numbered in the millions, that it threatens the existence of such other forms of escape as the mystery novel, that its popularity reveals strange and terrifying things about the psyche of Twentieth Century Man . . .

But where is the actual evidence of any real boom?

Let's look at the various fields involved:

Books: I'm writing this column in mid-February; as a reviewer I've received advance copies of most publications through the first couple of weeks of March. For my New York *Times* column on mysteries, I've received 37 new hardcover novels — rather an off year; it was 50 at this point in 1954.

Know how many hardcover s.f. novels I've received? Exactly 3; and of these, one is a group of magazine novelets loosely assembled into a quasi-novel, another is a British import adapted from a radio play.

To be sure there have been 4 anthologies; regular readers know my opinions on the health of a field which subsists largely on anthologization. And there've been 4 paperback novels; but these were a minute percentage of the total paper output, and most of them were of pretty negligible quality.

In short, after more than five years of experiment and promotion, science fiction is not a significant part of book publishing.

Magazines: Here the picture looks superficially a little brighter. One can say that the number of "good" s.f. magazines ("good" both in editorial standards and in payment of acceptable, if still not lavish, fees to authors) has, in the past six years, increased by 200 or 300% — which sounds far more impressive than saying that there are now three or four such magazines instead of one. There are still an astonishing number of titles on the stands (they come and go so fast that it's hard to state figures, but I'd estimate around 20 to 25 when this appears); but most of those magazines are struggling along on minute circulations, paying their authors infinitesimal sums (often long after publication), and

living in the shadow of the bankruptcy courts.

Movies: There have been a few good science fiction films in the past few years (DESTINATION MOON, THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL . . .). But then there have always been a few good s.f. films (THINGS TO COME, FRANKENSTEIN, METROPOLIS and so on back to Georges Méliès).

(Readers particularly interested in the history of science-fantasy on the screen should consult the highly informative checklist of some 600 titles in the Spring issue of the amateur magazine *It*, which may be ordered for 25c from Walter W. Lee, Jr., 1205 S. 10th St., Coos Bay, Ore.)

Most of Hollywood's nominally s.f. product, however, seems to fall into two categories: "human interest" stories of acute scientific illiteracy, or crude quickies for kiddie matinees. I expect to read, any day, of the completion of ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET KIMBALL KINNISON.

Television: Surely if the love for science fiction is sweeping the country, all the sexes from Maine to Texas should be demanding it on their home viewing screens. But there is not a single program on the air devoted to s.f. for adults.

I have a feeling that this situation may be something like one that existed in radio before 1939. It seems wholly incredible today; but before the success of the Ellery Queen show, all advertising agency

and network executives were unanimous in maintaining, as a matter of principle, that a detective story was impossible on the air. Science fiction on TV has yet to find such an icebreaker as Queen (perhaps a series based on Heinlein's Future History . . . ?). There's been, so far as I know, only one attempt at a regular adult s.f. series; and that was so poorly executed, as science, as fiction, or as television, that its deserved failure simply confirmed the executives in their prejudice.

A little s.f. is slowly sneaking into TV. MEDIC has offered a dramatization of an H-bomb raid on Los Angeles (not yet broadcast at this writing, so I can't comment). And space travel has received the honor of a full-hour original TV-play on STUDIO ONE, and the ultimate indignity of a half hour starring Red Skelton. Unfortunately, the serious play contained little more plausibility and originality than the Skelton script, and was devoted entirely to the emotionalization of the anti-science fiction (and indeed anti-science) thesis that "Man isn't built for space."

Tentative conclusions: Rarely has any phenomenon been so disproportionately publicized as "the science fiction boom." It seems so plausible that history's most technological civilization should find its most popular expression in the literature of imaginative technology that critics have casually assumed that the plausibility is a fact . . . while the

public has calmly gone on reading about sex and violence, or the latest slick variant of the Cinderella story.

I honestly believe, as a critic, that s.f. has stimulating values, both in esthetics and as entertainment, to offer to all readers. But the fact remains that s.f. editors and authors (and one true and unfortunate "boom" is the large number of talented new writers attracted, by all the publicity, to a field too small to support them) are not reaching nearly so wide an audience as is supposed.

A number of critics (including me) said that science fiction at the end of World War II stood where the detective story did at the end of World War I. The statement was not inaccurate; but the developments in the post-war decade have not been remotely comparable. Somewhere we (the editors and authors) have slipped; and if you (the readers) have any ideas on where, I'd be very interested in hearing them. You, now reading this, have presumably been converted to an interest in this type of imaginative literature — any ideas on how to make further conversions?

To turn to the few new books (not covering all of those cited above because a couple of just-received items are still unread), plus some hitherto neglected leftovers from 1954:

NEW NOVELS

The only Grade A long fiction of 1955 to date is so exceedingly good

as to compensate for any number of duller items. *EARTHLIGHT* (Ballantine, \$2.75*; paper, 35c) represents Arthur C. Clarke at his best — and what is better in modern s.f.? This is Clarke in his quietly factual (yet poetically illuminating) vein, a convincingly real, scientifically detailed story of the near future, yet infused with that sense of wonder and excitement that we sometimes think vanished from literature around the time our voices changed. Plot: counterespionage on the moon during a threatened revolt of the planetary colonies. Special features: countless new sidelights on the probabilities of life on the moon, a stunningly different scene of a rescue in space, one of the all-time great space battles — and serious novelistic consideration of problems of loyalty and morality. Verdict: More books like this and there'd probably be no need for the questions I posed above.

James Blish's *EARTHMAN, COME HOME* (Putnam's, \$3.50*) is an assemblage of his *Okie* novelets from *Astounding* and elsewhere, making a vast and vague novel which does little justice to a fascinating concept; though you are constantly told that the scene is (magnificent idea!) the entire city of New York converted into a migrant space-mercenary, it never sounds like anything but just another spaceship, with the usual cardboard crew. Jack Finney's *THE BODY SNATCHERS* (Dell, 25c) has, oddly, exactly the same theme as

Philip K. Dick's *The Father-Thing* (F&SF, December, 1954): the hidden growth of soulless facsimiles which take over the places of human beings. A fair number of inconsistencies and inaccuracies prevent wholehearted acceptance of the book as science fiction; but Mr. Finney is, as always, intensely readable and unpredictably ingenious. Harold Rein's *FEW WERE LEFT* (John Day, \$3.50*) is, I guess, borderline s.f.; presumably its unspecified disaster is the atomic destruction of Manhattan. The attempt of a handful of survivors to create a new life in the subway tunnels is a promising theme; but oversimplified characterization and lack of story-movement make it a fairly dull book.

Noted for completists only: Algis Budrys' *FALSE NIGHT* (Lion, 25c); Robert Moore Williams' *THE CHAOS FIGHTERS* (Ace, 25c); Murray Leinster's *THE OTHER SIDE OF HERE* (Ace, 35c). The Leinster (a rewrite of *THE INCREDIBLE INVASION* from *Astounding*, 1936) does, however, include in the same volume A. E. van Vogt's incomparable hypergalactic fantasy-melodrama, *THE WEAPON MAKERS* (now retitled *ONE AGAINST ETERNITY*), which is an imperative purchase.

SHORT STORIES

Published and reviewed as "straight" fiction, J. B. Priestley's *THE OTHER PLACE* (Harper, \$3*) is actually a pure science-fantasy volume, and a fine one. Priestley has long been obsessed by the imagina-

tive potential of Time, and particularly by J. W. Dunne's serial-universe concepts. You'll recall the plays *DANGEROUS CORNER* and *I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE*, the recent novel *THE MAGICIANS*, the short story *The Strange Girl* (F&SF, January, 1954). This new book brings you that story and 8 others of the same kind, wonderfully evocative variations on a theme, rich in their ingenious thinking about time and in their full-bodied creation of contrasting eras.

Lloyd Arthur Eshbach has rendered immeasurable service to s.f. readers as owner-publisher-editor of Fantasy Press and Polaris Press. Anyone who has published Russell's *DEEP SPACE*, Williamson's *DARKER THAN YOU THINK*, and Stevens' *THE HEADS OF CERBERUS* has earned a perfect right to bring out a collection of his own short stories and novelets. But I think your opinion of Mr. Eshbach will remain higher if you fail to read the 9 unfortunate stories, ranging from 1932 to new and unpublished, gathered together as *TYRANT OF TIME* (Fantasy Press, \$3*).

ANTHOLOGIES

Frederik Pohl's *STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES NO. 3* (Ballantine, \$2*; paper, 35c) is easily the best of the anthologies to be considered here, if pretty far short of being the best in its series. There are, surprisingly, some tired stories here — old hands very competently telling tales that you've read often enough

already. But there are also bright fresh vigorous entries by Chad Oliver and Philip K. Dick and Richard Matheson; and even the less shining items are never mere padded hackwork.

Which reminds me that space-pressure has always managed to squeeze out earlier mention of Pohl's *STAR SHORT NOVELS* (Ballantine, \$2*; paper, 35c), published last year. This is indeed a strange, unsatisfactory, yet certainly not negligible book. In its three stories (from 17 to 25,000 words apiece), Jessamyn West attempts her first s.f. with skilled prose, a fine concept, and no logical development; Lester del Rey devotes fine storytelling to perhaps the most powerful idea yet conceived in theological science fiction, but wholly fails in making his theological notion believable; and Theodore Sturgeon tosses off coruscant pyrotechnics about nothing at all. In short, an exasperating collection — but worth looking into.

Harold W. Kuebler's *THE TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS* (Hanover, \$2.95) makes the snob-appeal pitch of trying to show that the best science fiction has flourished outside of the s.f. magazines. It's a hodgepodge of anthology favorites and meaningless "excerpts" from novels, with inadequate and inaccurate editorial comment. The enormous book (a third of a million words!) is a bargain, and contains some excellent reading; but anything of value you're sure to have

on your shelves already in some better collection.

Joseph Gallant's *STORIES OF SCIENTIFIC IMAGINATION* (Oxford Book Co., 70c) is something of a landmark: an anthology of s.f. for use in schools! The editor argues convincingly that "science fiction seems to provide a natural medium for reading in core-curriculum classes," because such classes are "a fusion of sciences, social studies, and English." The book is not of interest to the regular s.f. reader; the stories, largely good, have all been previously reprinted, most of them several times; but you might bring it to the attention of your children's teachers. It's a pity that a school text contains so many errors (17 mistakes in a bibliographic listing of 22 titles!); but maybe core-curriculum teachers are less particular than old-fashioned hidebound academicians.

No review, of course, but I can't help calling your attention to one other recent anthology: *THE BEST FROM F&SF: FOURTH SERIES*, edited by Anthony Boucher (Doubleday, \$3.50*). Fifteen stories (adorned by 7 verses) from the 1954 issues of this magazine — I hope you'll like it.

NON-FICTION

Robert Lindner's *THE FIFTY-MINUTE HOUR* (Rinehart, \$3.50*) is subtitled "a collection of true psychoanalytic tales," and Max Lerner's introduction points out that Lindner has, in the psychoanalytic tale,

created virtually a new artform. The longest of the 5 tales is of intense interest to readers of s.f.: *The Jet-Propelled Couch*, the extraordinary narrative of a research physicist who retreated into a science-fictional world of his own creation, a galactic future so consistently real as to entrap even the analyst. It's a true story reminiscent of the best fiction of the Kuttners, and nowise to be missed.

And then there are the books about the saucers. . . . Cedric Alingham's *FLYING SAUCER FROM MARS* (British Book Centre, \$2.75*) is about how the author met, chatted with and photographed a Martian saucerman in Scotland on February 18, 1954. Leonard G. Cramp's *SPACE, GRAVITY AND THE FLYING SAUCER* (British Book Centre, \$3*) is about the "Unity of Creation Theory," which explains how saucers move by controlling gravitational fields and why rockets will never get us into space. Harold T. Wilkins' *FLYING SAUCERS ON THE ATTACK* (Citadel, \$3.50*) is about how the saucers represent an attacking enemy and we must abandon all these sissy ideas of welcoming friends from space. Personally, I'll confess, I collect these damned things and wouldn't miss a word of any one of them; you, on the other hand, may be better off with your hobby of collecting used Sears, Roebuck catalogs.

HUMOR

Fantasy-Times recently described *Mad* as "the non-science-fiction comic book that is read by most science fiction fans." I think this is true; at least I hope it is, and should like to change *most* to *all*. To attempt to describe *Mad's* satire is simply to pile up such adjectives as trenchant, Rabelaisian, lusty, gusty, busty, penetrating, vershlugginer. . . . You'll find a rich sampling in Harvey Kurtzman's *THE MAD READER* (Ballantine, 35c) — all fantasy to some extent, I suppose, and two sequences (*Superduperman* and *Flesh Garden*) s.f., complete with mad scientists, mad artists and happily mad readers.

Both Ronald Searles's *THE FEMALE APPROACH* (Knopf, \$3.50*) and Charles Addams' *HOMEBOODIES* (Simon & Schuster, \$2.95*) were listed in F&SF's Best-of-1954 but never properly reviewed here — chiefly because I find myself speechless before two such masters. Max Beerbohm paid the precise tribute to Searles when he wrote: "There seems to be no bounds to your strangely inventive faculty, and to your power of converting the macabre into the most pleasurable of frolics." The same words could be justly written to Addams. Both men think and draw as well, and in the same manner, as John Collier writes; and this department has no higher superlatives in stock.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered from F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 2.

Do you want to know what type of man stands the best chance of surviving the holocaust of his world? You'll learn the answer in this brief and pointed item which is, like most Mathesons, not quite like any other story you've read.

Pattern for Survival

by RICHARD MATHESON

And they stood beneath the crystal towers, beneath the polished heights which, like scintillant mirrors, caught rosy sunset on their faces until their city was one vivid, coruscated blush.

Ras slipped an arm about the waist of his beloved.

"Happy?" he inquired, in a tender voice.

"Oh, yes," she breathed. "Here in our beautiful city where there is peace and happiness for all, how could I be anything but happy?"

Sunset cast its roseate benediction upon their soft embrace.

THE END

THE CLATTER CEASED. HIS HANDS curled in like blossoms and his eyes fell shut. The prose was wine. It trickled on the taste buds of his mind, a dizzying potion. I've done it again, he recognized, by George in heaven, I've done it again.

Satisfaction towed him out to sea. He went down for the third

time beneath its happy drag. Surfacing then, reborn, he estimated wordage, addressed envelope, slid in manuscript, weighed total, affixed stamps and sealed. Another brief submergence in the waters of delight, then up withal and to the mailbox.

It was almost twelve as Richard Allen Shaggley hobbled down the quiet street in his shabby overcoat. He had to hurry or he'd miss the pick-up and he mustn't do that. *Ras And The City of Crystal* was too superlative to wait another day. He wanted it to reach the editor immediately. It was a certain sale.

Circuiting the giant, pipe-strewn hole (When, in the name of heaven would they finish repairing that blasted sewer?), he limped on hurriedly, envelope clutched in rigid fingers, heart a turmoil of vibration.

Noon. He reached the mailbox and cast about anxious glances for the postman. No sign of him. A sigh of pleasure and relief escaped his

chapped lips. Face aglow, Richard Allen Shaggley listened to the envelope thump gently on the bottom of the mailbox.

The happy author shuffled off, coughing.

Al's legs were bothering him again. He shambled up the quiet street, teeth gritted slightly, leather sack pulling down his weary shoulder. Getting old, he thought, haven't got the drive any more. Rheumatism in the legs. Bad; makes it hard to do the route.

At twelve fifteen, he reached the dark green mailbox and drew the keys from his pocket. Stooping, with a groan, he opened up the box and drew out its contents.

A smiling eased his pain-tensed face; he nodded once. Another yarn by Shaggley. Probably be snatched up right away. The man could really write.

Rising with a grunt, Al slid the envelope into his sack, relocked the mailbox, then trudged off, still smiling to himself. Makes a man proud, he thought, carrying his stories; even if my legs do hurt.

Al was a Shaggley fan.

When Rick arrived from lunch a little after three that afternoon, there was a note from his secretary on the desk.

New ms. from Shaggley just arrived, it read. Beautiful job. Don't forget R.A. wants to see it when you're through. S.

Delight cast illumination across the editor's hatchet face. By George in heaven, this was manna from what had threatened to be a fruitless afternoon. Lips drawn back in what, for him, was smiling, he dropped into his leather chair, restrained empathic finger twitchings for the blue pencil (No need of it for a Shaggley yarn!) and plucked the envelope from the cracked glass surface of his desk. By George, a Shaggley story; what luck! R.A. would beam.

He sank into the cushion, instantly absorbed in the opening nuance of the tale. A tremor of transport palsied outer sense. Breathless, he plunged on into the story depths. *What balance, what delineation!* How the man could write. Distractedly, he brushed plaster dust off his pin-stripe sleeve.

As he read, the wind picked up again, fluttering his straw-like hair, buffeting like tepid wings against his brow. Unconsciously, he raised his hand and traced a delicate finger along the scar which trailed like livid thread across his cheek and lower temple.

The wind grew stronger. It moaned by pretzeled I-beams and scattered brown-edged papers on the soggy rug. Rick stirred restlessly and stabbed a glance at the gaping fissure in the wall (When, in the name of heaven, would they finish those repairs?), then returned, joy renewed, to Shaggley's manuscript.

Finishing at last, he fingered away

a tear of bittersweetness and depressed an intercom key.

"Another check for Shaggley," he ordered, then tossed the snapped-off key across his shoulder.

At three-thirty, he brought the manuscript to R.A.'s office and left it there.

At four, the publisher laughed and cried over it, gnarled fingers rubbing at the scabrous bald patch on his head.

Old hunchbacked Dick Allen set type for Shaggley's story that very afternoon, vision blurred by happy tears beneath his eyeshade, liquid coughing unheard above the busy clatter of his machine.

The story hit the stand a little after six. The scar-faced dealer shifted on his tired legs as he read it over six times before, reluctantly, offering it for sale.

At half past six, the little bald-patched man came hobbling down the street. A hard day's work, a well-earned rest, he thought, stopping at the corner newsstand for some reading matter.

He gasped. By George in heaven,

a new Shaggley story! What luck!

The only copy too. He left a quarter for the dealer who wasn't there at the moment.

He took the story home, shambling by skeletal ruins (Strange, those burned buildings hadn't been replaced yet), reading as he went.

He finished the story before arriving home. Over supper, he read it once again, shaking his lumpy head at the marvel of its impact, the unbreakable magic of its workmanship. It inspires me, he thought.

But not tonight. Now was the time for putting things away: the cover on the typewriter, the shabby overcoat, threadbare pin-stripe, eyeshade, mailman's cap and leather sack all in their proper places.

He was asleep by ten, dreaming about mushrooms. And, in the morning, wondering once again why those first observers had not described the cloud as more like a toadstool.

By six A.M. Shaggley, breakfasted, was at the typewriter.

This is the story, he wrote, of how Ras met the beautiful priestess of Shahglee and she fell in love with him.

Note:

If you enjoy THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, you will like some of the other MERCURY PUBLICATIONS:

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
MERCURY MYSTERY BOOKS
BESTSELLER MYSTERY BOOKS
JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY BOOKS

"We will," Arthur Clarke declares ringingly in PRELUDE TO SPACE, "take no frontiers into space"; and many of us look upon the interplanetary age as one that will at last unite men and reaffirm their brotherhood. But, Mr. McIntosh suggests, may not the very act of going into space create new frontiers? Can men, after generations of specialized adaptation to their various different new worlds, still regard each other as brothers? This is the central question in a novelet of galactic politics — not the Graustarkian palace-politics of interstellar romances, but the solid practicalities of party-strategy, voting-booth politics — written, as one always expects of this warmly observant young Scot, with primary emphasis upon people.

Eleventh Commandment

by J. T. MCINTOSH

"I JUST WANT TO REMIND YOU ONCE again," said the suave radio voice apologetically, *"that the intermarriage poll is being held throughout the galaxy on Friday . . ."*

"Could anyone forget?" Gerry murmured incredulously as he waited in the lounge for Wyn. "Could anyone possibly forget, I wonder?"

"What was that you said, Gerry?" called Wyn from the bedroom.

"Nothing, honey."

"Don't mumble, then. It's a delicate operation getting myself into this dress, and I need all my concentration."

Another set reproduced the announcer's voice. *"Everyone who is over twenty-one and not certified insane*

has a vote," he said reassuringly. *"Please use it."*

"Here's two who will," said Moyra, looking up into Bob's eyes. "But anyway — *could* they stop us getting married, darling, even if . . . ?"

"They could," said Bob briefly.

"I just don't believe it," said Moyra. "Oh, I know some people will act nasty to us — you expect that — but I can't imagine them really . . ."

"Merely because the question at issue doesn't seem to concern you," the announcer went on, through a third radio, *"don't waste your vote. Make up your mind. Listen to the AMAB arguments and the Realist point of view, decide which party to support,*

and on Friday, don't forget to do it . . ."

Adam switched off the radio with unnecessary violence.

"Darling, I was listening!" Elis protested, looking up from the mirror in which she had been surveying herself critically.

"It's all nonsense," said Adam.

He frowned.

"I guess it is at that. They only want to know how people feel. . . . There can't be any question of actually doing anything —"

"We've got enough worries without that," Adam muttered.

Elis swung round and caught his wrist hard. It was a masculine gesture, as if she was the dominant partner. "Don't talk like that," she said sharply. "We'll get money somehow. We always have, haven't we?"

She snapped the switch on again.

Through all the sets, the one in Gerry and Wyn's maisonette, the one in Moyra's flat, the one in Elis's cheap hotel bedroom, and probably through a million others, the announcer spoke with gentle reproach:

"It's a very important question, and every local council wants to get as near a hundred per cent poll as possible. Eastover is famed for its progressive, well-informed social consciousness, and Jordan particularly is known for its forward-looking . . ."

"That," sighed Gerry, nodding out of the window as Wyn joined him, already wearing her ankle-length cape. "You needn't have

hurried, darling. We can't go out for a while yet."

II

It was raining in Jordan.

That's like saying grass is green or light is bright. But it's worth saying nevertheless, for sometimes grass isn't green, sometimes light isn't bright — and sometimes it isn't raining in Jordan.

It wasn't Jordan's heavy, fierce, bouncing rain, nor Jordan's warm, treacly downpour. It was Jordan's steady, lukewarm drizzle which, so much more than the other two varieties, seems perfectly capable of going on forever.

The streets were almost deserted, though it was still early evening. In the hard, blurred glare of the street lamps, poll bills in heavy black type screamed silently to no one at all, for the few people who were in the wet, glistening streets were hurrying along.

There wasn't much to show that Jordan was on Eastover, in the Rotel system, and not on Earth. In daytime the much yellower though brighter sun gave sufficient clue, without anything else; at night, when the sky was overcast, almost all the differences disappeared and Jordan was like any modern Terran city where it happened to be raining.

The rain stopped abruptly, but apparently not entirely unexpectedly — for almost instantly the streets were alive with people hurrying about in all directions: people

who seemed to know to the second when the rain would start again, just as they had known when it was going to stop. Even on Eastover, even in Jordan, people preferred not to be drenched if they could help it. And they developed a weather sense which told them when they could get somewhere dry. Or at least, when they could try.

Wyn and Gerry were two units in the crowd, hustling together from the southeast. Not many streets away, from the north, Adam and Elis hurried southwards, two more scurrying, paired-off units. From due east came Bob and Moyra, half walking, half running, trying to beat the rain which they knew was coming on again soon.

And from the south came another unit, but a solitary unit, a calm, unhurried unit. Mackenzie wouldn't run because mere rain threatened. He stalked deliberately through the shorter, fatter, quicker, scuttling, undignified thousands who cared about time, about their clothes, about getting wet. He was tall and thin and his clothes were tight. He didn't wear a top hat, but that didn't matter. Spiritually he was top-hatted.

Just as Wyn and Gerry saw the lights of the Savoy, the threatened drizzle resumed. It drizzled only for an instant, however — then it ceased to be the drizzle and became the warm, sticky downpour.

The crowds in the streets dissolved like sugar cubes. Wyn and

Gerry got a dark doorway to themselves. They neither knew nor cared what happened to everybody else.

"Let's chance it," said Gerry, his eye measuring the distance across the swimming street to the neon-lit canopy of the Savoy.

"No, no, no!" wailed Wyn, horrified at the suggestion. "My dress can't take it — the rain must go off soon!"

"Because your dress can't take it," said Gerry, nodding understandingly. It was no use refusing to understand Wyn — he had married her peculiar feminine logic as well as the rest of her.

He had to disagree, however, after looking round, smelling the rain, making faces at it and rolling it round on his tongue, as it were. "Sorry, Wyn," he said. "I'm afraid it's on for quite a while. Want to stay here all night, honey?"

Wyn *was* a honey, even in the harsh street lighting, even wrapped in a shapeless raincoat. Not a beauty, that's something else again. Wyn's little white face had piquancy, vitality, infinite capacity for delight, and no classical regularity whatever. She was a laughing urchin, but a feminine urchin. There was nothing boyish about Wyn.

Gerry was just the kind of man to go with her, big, protective, understanding, and with a vast, enveloping sense of humor.

They were both Eastoverans. That, perhaps, is important.

"Oh, look, Wyn!" Gerry ex-

claimed, looking over her shoulder. "There's Mackenzie."

Wyn snarled with astonishing ferocity. "Why should I want to see Mackenzie, now or ever?" she demanded. But she looked all the same. She was the kind of girl who would say "I won't look!" and peer through her fingers.

He marched through the rain, imperturbably, implacably, like something out of Dickens. One felt his name should be Fenberg or Tuckle or Markwell. Yet he wasn't one of the *funny* Dickensian characters. There was something menacing about him, quietly menacing, as if he was going to walk past you or over you or through you whenever you happened to be in his way — just as he was ignoring the rain as something of no account.

"He's going to the Savoy!" Wyn exclaimed. "The nerve of it!"

"He'll have to pay to get in," said Gerry philosophically. "If all the Realists come tonight, so much the better."

Mackenzie could hardly have heard them through the drumming and swishing of the rain. Nevertheless, he turned abruptly like a radio-controlled robot and marched towards them, squelching.

"Ah, the delightful Youngs!" he said, stopping about three feet away from them, still in the rain, still ignoring it. "What a pity we are enemies. You really are a charming couple — I'd be glad to use you in my campaign."

Wyn gave him the cold shoulder, the left one. She turned rudely into the doorway and stared intently at the keyhole of the locked door.

"That's just the difference in our methods, Mackenzie," said Gerry blandly. "I wouldn't use you in my campaign. Your methods may be successful, but I wouldn't care to use some of them."

Mackenzie sighed. "And for that reason, among others, I'll win," he said. "Aren't you people even trying?"

He sniffed, bowed sardonically at Wyn, who was still turned away from him and couldn't even see the gesture, and strode across and into the Savoy.

Wyn whirled indignantly. "See that!" she exclaimed. "*Our* ball — and we're not there — and *he* is!"

Gerry grinned. "Then let's run for it, rain or no rain."

"No, I can't. My dress —"

"Then I'll run for it and send out someone with an umbrella or something."

It wasn't necessary. The rain halted momentarily, switching from one reservoir to another, and without wasting time in talk, knowing how brief the respite was going to be, Wyn and Gerry dashed across the rain-washed street. Out of breath but triumphant, they reached the shelter of the canopy just before the downpour resumed where it left off.

"We'll get wet on the way back," Gerry warned.

"What does the way *back* matter?"

asked Wyn scornfully. "The obtuseness of men!"

In the foyer they looked at the bills while they got their breath back. Some simply said "AMAB!" Others showed a couple dancing, with the legend "Grand AMAB Ball." Still others, for those who would take the time to read all about it, had two columns of big type presenting the sales talk. None of the men and women dashing in out of the rain had time, apparently. Or perhaps they knew all about it.

Anyway, there were plenty of people dashing in. "The rain's done us a good turn, honey," said Gerry jubilantly. "It stopped in time to drive them out, and once they were out, they carried on. There's going to be a big crowd."

But Wyn had disappeared into the ladies' room. She was interested enough in the AMAB campaign, even excited about it sometimes, and she was certainly loyal. However, at the moment she was a girl at a dance with the man she loved. And if he happened to be her husband too, so much the better—he would be with her after the dance as well. AMAB could wait for a few hours.

Gerry checked his raincoat at the men's cloakroom. "How's it going, Emily?" he asked the girl in charge there.

Emily was a showpiece, selected for looks alone. She looked good enough to eat, and Gerry found himself playing with the bizarre thought

that by the Galactic Code it wouldn't be a crime to eat her, because she wasn't an intelligent creature.

"Oh, we're doing fine, Mr. Young," she said brightly.

"How many are in already?"

But Emily could only count to ten, and so wasn't much help. Gerry left her and went to look for Wyn.

He didn't have to wait for her. She couldn't have done more than take off her coat and make a few quick passes at her hair and dress. She came out and joined him as if their watches had been synchronized.

"Yes, honey," he said contentedly, just looking at her. "You've still got it."

She knew she still had it, but she glowed because he still wanted to say it. And that improved the effect.

She wore a rose-pink net dress that covered her from throat to mid-calf, with long loose sleeves. The net alone being something less than adequate, red built-in accessories here and there reinforced the net in small but strategic areas.

And Gerry was delighted to find that though in any beauty contest Emily would be placed first and Wyn second, and though he had been married to Wyn for four years, he couldn't think of a single thing he'd rather do with Emily than with Wyn.

They went in together and straight on to the floor. Though Gerry had organized the dance, he was sufficiently interested in Wyn to wait till after the first waltz before he

even looked to see how many people were there.

"Not bad," he murmured, "considering it's so early. It's not funds we want, Wyn, it's support. We want a lot of people here, not for the cash they bring in but to make this a success. We need a few successes. We *should* win, but —"

"Please, Gerry, not tonight," Wyn pleaded. "Tonight I'm out with a *man*, not a political campaign."

"You're not out with a political campaign, honey," said Gerry quietly. "But look at those two."

Wyn looked. Elis Mastro and Adam Bentley were dancing together. They were clinging to each other passionately, almost desperately, as if at any moment someone or something would come and tear them apart. One couldn't see, but one could sense shadows behind them.

"They're always out with a political campaign," Gerry murmured. "If the Realists win, they . . . And look at those two."

Moyra Molin and Bob Drake were tenderer, less desperate. Bob was Gerry's cousin. Moyra and Bob were intelligent people, and knew what was going on in the galaxy. Long ago they had faced the fact that since Moyra had been born on Greensing and Bob on Westover there were going to be difficulties in their life together. But they were going to face them together, rather than remove them by going separate ways.

"Suppose you and I belonged to different planets, honey?" Gerry said, rubbing his cheek against Wyn's hair.

"I know — but we don't, and tonight I want to enjoy myself. I've got a new dress, I'm with my favorite man, and — ugh!"

She grunted disgustedly as she saw Mackenzie standing in the shadows at the back of the ballroom, under the balcony. He was alone, of course. Mackenzie was generally alone.

"He's got his nerve," Wyn muttered. "Coming to *our* dance, as if he —"

"We were rude to him outside," said Gerry contritely. "Let's go and talk to him. Politely this time."

Wyn followed him reluctantly. She was an honest, open soul. If she didn't like someone, she hated being civil to him. Mackenzie was one of the few people she really disliked. "He brings out the worst in me, that man," she had said — often. And Gerry never denied it. The only time Wyn became a shrew was when she talked to or about Mackenzie. She wasn't so much for AMAB as against Mackenzie.

Gerry strode towards Mackenzie, pulling Wyn behind him. Mackenzie saw them and waited impassively.

John Mackenzie was a once-seen-never-forgotten type. He was like nothing which had ever happened before. The faintly bluish tinge of his skin suggested Rinan. His height

and gait made one think of Scarisac, but the shape of his head was pure Greensing. His accent was almost sterile, with only traces of Earth and, later, Eastover. Gerry had puzzled over his origin for some time before hearing Mackenzie was from Metapur, of Terran parents. It fitted—it was the only thing that did.

Even apart from the question of his origin, his appearance was startling. His nose was tiny, the one weak feature in a strong face. A big nose would have balanced his features, might have made them congruous if not pleasing. His chin was heavy, his mouth wide and full—the mouth of a man with strong sympathies, or so one would have thought if it weren't so often pulled into a hard, straight line. His eyes, failing the nose, might have brought unity to his face; but they did and told precisely nothing. They were just eyes, as characterless as glass.

"Glad to see you here, Mr. Mackenzie," Gerry said affably. "I didn't know you danced."

"On the contrary," said Mackenzie bluntly, "not being without some element of intelligence, you know very well I don't."

"A typical Mackenzieism," said Gerry brightly. "It gives nothing away and puts the onus right back on the enemy. Also it assumes what is not so. How could I know you don't dance? You could be an ex-ballet dancer for all I know."

"You know I have no social

graces. So unlike you and your charming wife." He bowed to Wyn. It was not ironic. It was obviously not ironic. "I can't fight this campaign on my own personal charm."

"Please don't talk about that," said Wyn impatiently. "People are supposed to be here to enjoy themselves."

"Not to demonstrate their conviction that All Men Are Brothers?" inquired Mackenzie, with mock surprise.

"Not just now. There's a time and place for everything."

"That attitude is going to be very useful to me," said Mackenzie drily.

"Oh, come on, Gerry," exclaimed Wyn, tugging at his arm. They swept back to the dance-floor.

"You were rude again," said Gerry reproachfully.

"He's a cheat, a schemer and a swindler," Wyn retorted hotly.

"Steady on!" Gerry murmured, laughing. "I grant you he wouldn't care much how he got his results, but he's sincere enough. Know why you don't like him, Wyn?"

"No, and I don't care."

"You don't like him because he doesn't find you attractive."

"I like that!" said Wyn, outraged, stopping dancing.

"No, you don't like that. Neither does any girl with normal feminine impulses. He pays you compliments, but he doesn't mean them, and you know he doesn't mean them." Gerry paused, then added shrewdly: "When you find a man some women dislike,

he may be a wolf. But when you find a man all women dislike, you know he must be the exact opposite."

"That's a rather disgusting idea," Wyn exclaimed.

"Not at all." But he didn't continue the discussion. Gerry always went by the principle that it took two to make a quarrel, and refused to be one of them. He changed the subject. "Say, I wonder what Mackenzie wants with those two?"

Wyn turned to look. "Elis and Adam! You'd never expect to see him talking to a couple like them. I'd have thought —"

"One would, wouldn't one?" Gerry agreed. "No, look, Mackenzie's leaving. He was probably just passing the time of day."

"When," asked Wyn venomously, "did you ever know Mackenzie to be just passing the time of day?"

Gerry didn't follow that up either.

For the rest of the evening they were just an ordinary young couple at a dance, enjoying themselves. There were no campaign speeches. Gerry was relying more on people's good sense than on any impassioned appeal.

He was too easy-going and he knew it. However, when he had been appointed to organize the AMAB campaign on Eastover, and particularly in Jordan, the people concerned had known what he was like. So he didn't try to transform himself into another Mackenzie. He continued to be Gerry Young, sincere but not fanatic, competent without the high

efficiency of some people, on the job not twenty-four hours a day but something like six, a young man who hoped his party was going to be successful but who wasn't going to extraordinary lengths to ensure it.

He was fighting for people like his cousin Bob, for a principle, for an ideal. He wasn't concerned, he wasn't biased. He was honest, sensible, and incapable of excess, particularly emotional excess.

That was just the trouble.

III

As he waited in an all-night café, sipping coffee, Mackenzie stared out silently at the dreary, dark, drenched square outside.

Out there, in the rain, the posters fought a silent, bloodless, but desperate battle. Wherever a Realist bill penetrated, there was an AMAB bill to jump on its back. Where an AMAB legend seemed to have found sanctuary on a solitary, lonely billboard, a Realist counterblast sprang from the shadows and clawed at its throat.

There is only one human race! a huge AMAB bill proclaimed.

Beside it was a Realist poster which screamed: **YOU ARE A CRIMINAL** and continued in smaller type . . . *if you subject your children to lifelong unhappiness.*

Another AMAB bill simply stated AMAB's title theme: *All men are brothers.*

A Realist bill retorted cryptically,

shrewdly: *Brothers, but not brothers-in-law.*

And that was the core of the matter.

There were a lot of other so-called brotherhood issues coming, questions to be settled about the interrelations of the many human settlements and civilizations in the galaxy, but they were only now coming and the intermarriage problem was come.

The AMAB party stood for free marriage between members of any races, and the Realists opposed it. That was the question of the moment. That was the question on which every person in the galaxy who was sane and twenty-one or over was entitled to vote. That was the campaign which was being fought out on every colonized world.

There was, of course, much to be said on both sides. Otherwise the conflict couldn't have been so vast and even. Almost on the eve of the ballot no one knew how it would go.

The AMAB point of view was that all the races, different though they might be now, had come from Earth. That there was still only one human race. That intermarriage would always be possible, and should never be forbidden. That there should be no prejudice, no racial distinction, no color bar. That difference and segregation breed dissension, and people should simply be regarded as people, whatever their color, shape, race or origin.

The Realists, in effect, said this was all very well, but not realistic.

Racial difference was a fact, and it was no use pretending it didn't exist. That went for prejudice and distinction and color bars too. By all means regard all men as brothers, the Realists said, but don't marry a girl of a different race, and don't let your sister marry a man of a different color. The Realists wanted an eleventh commandment. They wanted marriage restricted by law to members of the same race.

It was after that that the complications emerged, the thorny problems, the special cases, the interminable arguments. Did the Realists, the AMABs demanded, want to partition the galaxy, stultify trade and other intercourse? What unmarried woman would go to a world none of whose men she could possibly marry? What man would accept a job on a world whose girls he was supposed to treat with civility, no less and no more? And how did Earth, the origin of all the races, stand — was new colonization to stop?

The Realists retorted that they were concerned with the situation as it was, not as it had been five hundred years before, or as it would be five hundred years later. In five hundred years' time people might be ready for AMAB ideas, in which case AMAB ideas would prevail. Meantime, marriage between clearly different races, like those of Scarisac and Rinan, say, should be forbidden. On the obviously difficult question of Earth, the Realists were divided.

Some recognized no difference; others said that Earth, the mother world, would always be in a special position and that no prohibition should apply between Earth and any other world.

Mackenzie frowned slightly as his gaze passed from bill to bill. A bill rarely made anything but an emotional appeal, and it was all too clear that the AMAB bills, the AMAB ideas generally, made a stronger emotional appeal than the Realists' argument. The Realists had to discuss, to propound, to argue. Mackenzie, an experienced, competent politician, very much preferred not to argue. He knew that a fiery phrase might be worth more than a hundred arguments.

All men are brothers, for example. His party, the Realists, had to retort with *Brothers, but not brothers-in-law*. The one was an appeal to the emotions, the other an appeal to the reason. Mackenzie, a first-class propagandist, didn't have to ponder over which appeal he'd rather make, if he had the choice.

Mackenzie looked up as steps sounded behind him. "Have some coffee," he invited.

He waited for his two guests to sit down, to commit themselves. At the moment they could still say no, and make it clear that they had come only to say no quite definitely, so that he wouldn't bother them again. But after the passage of a few more seconds it would be too late for that.

When it was too late, when they

were settled and drinking coffee, he said gently: "You came here — you must be interested in my proposition. Perhaps you'll tell me a little more about yourselves before we go any further."

Elis and Adam glanced at each other. Their glance told Mackenzie almost all he really wanted to know — that they were very much in love, that they were afraid of him, that they were desperate for money and that they had already decided to agree to almost anything.

Elis couldn't have been more than nineteen. Her amber eyes, wasp waist and the obvious power of her legs proclaimed her instantly a Midinan. On paper the differences would barely exist — girls other than Midinans had amber eyes, waists seventeen inches less than their hips, and legs of the same dimensions and appearance as Elis's. But the overall impression was unmistakable. Anyone who had had anything to do with Midina would identify her at a glance.

Adam was equally obviously a Faquistan. He had the characteristic sallowness yet smoothness of skin, the powerful, jerky walk, the hunched shoulders and the over-large feet of most Faquistans.

"What do you want to know, Mr. Mackenzie?" asked Elis. She was trying to keep herself under rigid control, but she couldn't help licking her lips nervously.

"Can you act?" asked Mackenzie. "Both of you?"

"We've done most things. Once we were part of a cabaret act."

"You want to get married. Why aren't you married already?"

Silence. Elis and Adam exchanged glances again.

"Is it by any chance because one of you is wanted by the police, and you're afraid —"

"No," said Elis sharply. She was clearly the spokesman for both of them. "If you must know, it's because we can't afford to get married. That's all. We want money, we need money, but we aren't criminals and there's nothing you can use to blackmail us."

"There's no question of blackmail," Mackenzie protested.

"No, but I expect you'd be glad to know something about us that would give you a hold over us. Well, there isn't anything."

"So much the better," said Mackenzie airily. "Criminals would be no use to me. Another thing: naturally you're AMAB supporters?"

Elis hesitated, then nodded.

"Yet you know I want to break AMAB — and you're still listening?"

Another resolute nod.

"How does that make sense?" Mackenzie demanded.

"We hope AMAB wins. What happens here, on one of scores of worlds, won't affect the issue anyway."

She tried to stare defiantly at him, but her gaze dropped before Mackenzie's showed the slightest sign of doing so.

"If we do what you want," she murmured, more to Adam and herself than to Mackenzie, "maybe it won't have the effect you want. And even if it does, if a little thing like that could make all the difference . . . But it *can't*, and we need the money."

Mackenzie nodded. He was prepared to accept that. Elis was rationalizing, as people so often did when something they wanted was offered at the cost of something which they didn't want but which might never happen. People would sell their heads if the price was big enough and they were assured by someone with a letter or two after his name that they could live without a head.

Elis and Adam were refusing to believe that anything they might do could have any effect on the big issue. They thought they would be able to have their cake and eat it.

They might, of course, be right. Mackenzie didn't think so. Mackenzie rarely did anything which wasn't worth while. He didn't think he would be handing over a biggish sum of Realist funds for nothing.

When Mackenzie had gone, Elis and Adam lingered rather miserably in the café.

"He knew exactly what to offer," said Adam bitterly. "Not too little, just enough to make us . . . We couldn't say no to that, Elis, could we?"

"I couldn't," Elis admitted. "It's

nothing to the Realist party, but it'll get us out of all our difficulties, clear us here and give us a start somewhere else . . . We should have said no just the same."

"I don't know," Adam temporized. "It's not as if it's really going to matter —"

"Maybe not, but suppose everybody said that?" said Elis, beginning to see new objections now that it was too late. "Everybody everywhere, not just here in Jordan. He made us promise not to get married now — said it would spoil the whole thing if we were married. Well, suppose a law was passed that stopped us ever getting married?"

Adam laughed abruptly. "Hell, that needn't worry us. We'll get married immediately we get our hands on the money. And then no law can touch us. All I'm worried about is — this thing we're to do. Will we be able to go through with it?"

"I will," Elis declared. "It's you I'm worried about — though you've got the easy part."

"Easy!" Adam exclaimed.

"How would you like what's going to happen to me?"

"It's going to be worse for me."

"Don't let's argue, darling. We both have to go through with it now. We've promised. And immediately afterwards, we'll go away where it's warm and sunny."

"And get married," said Adam.

"Before the ballot," Elis added. "Just in case."

"You don't really think —"

"It's not a question of thinking anything. We want to get married as soon as we can anyway — don't we?"

There was a certain desperate hunger in their embrace — but a singular absence of rapture. There were shadows behind them. There would always be shadows behind them, wherever they went.

And they would never realize that they put the shadows there themselves, by being the kind of people they were.

IV

Gerry and Wyn saw the whole performance, as it happened.

They hardly ever went to night clubs, but Wyn, her appetite for soft lights and sweet music whetted by the AMAB dance, insisted on another evening out the next night, after a day of AMAB meetings and rallies. So when Elis, Adam and a few others earned their money, assisted by some amateurs who didn't know there were any professionals involved, Gerry and Wyn happened to be around to see them do it.

Jordan was by no means the hot spot of Eastover. On the contrary it was regarded as a sober, respectable city, a sort of weathercock for the whole planet. If Jordan passed a thing, no other city in the world was likely to object to it. Other cities gained the reputation of being fast or daring or progressive by doing things that Jordan wouldn't do.

Jordan's night clubs, the Spacedive included, were suave and sophisticated without being feverish. Anyone too obviously drunk was politely ejected. The cabaret girls never wore too much or too little. The sketches and songs were suggestive in only a subtle, well-bred way. The only gambling was strictly legal, open and regularly inspected.

"May I talk about AMAB, honey?" Gerry asked whimsically as they sipped curacao.

Wyn grinned. "Sure, if you want to. Last night was a special occasion. I wanted you to myself, without AMAB sticking its oar in."

"You look even better than you did last night."

"That wasn't what I was asking for," Wyn murmured, "but I won't complain now I've got it. Now you can say anything you like about AMAB, and I'll agree with every word."

Gerry smiled, then frowned as his thoughts passed from Wyn to the campaign. "Mackenzie's too quiet," he said. "He's going to do something, naturally, and I'd be quite happy if I only knew what it was. But I don't — which means there'll be no counter-measures."

"Is there really anything to worry about, Gerry?" asked Wyn. "I mean, is there any chance of the Realists getting anywhere?"

"They might. Especially here on Eastover, with Mackenzie directing operations."

"But even if the ballot is against

us, can they possibly pass a law against mixed marriages?"

"Oh yes — and they will. A sort of eleventh commandment. Back on Earth, the Realists are in the majority. They need only a vote of confidence to go ahead with their program. If the universal ballot's in the Realists' favor a new law is automatic, and there won't be any delay about putting it into operation."

Wyn made an impatient gesture with her hand, as if she were tired of it and wanted to throw it away. She had forgotten that she was going to agree with every word. "You can't just forbid mixed marriages like that."

"Oh yes you can. All the Realists need is a decisive majority, and you'll see whether mixed marriages can be forbidden or not."

"But what about all the mixed marriages there are already?"

"They won't be annulled, of course," said Gerry, not entirely happily. "But it's not going to be very nice for mixed couples. They'll be pointed out, laughed at, made the butt for anything the local humorist thinks is funny."

Wyn shook her head definitely. "People aren't as bad as that," she said. "People are pretty nice, really."

"Taken all over, maybe. But it takes only one person to make a nasty scene."

Wyn couldn't see it. "Look, there's Bob and Moyra," she said. She nodded at a table on the floor of

the club, a little lower than the balcony where their own table was. Catching her glance, Moyra waved back. So did Bob.

"Take Moyra and Bob," said Wyn. "Moyra was born on Greensing and Bob was born here. They're nice people. When they're warned, do you really think anyone would . . . would . . ."

"Yes," said Gerry quietly. "Suppose Moyra and Bob get married — and the Realists win, and pass their law against mixed marriage. You want to know what's going to happen to Moyra and Bob?"

He stared down at his cousin and Moyra, frowning. "I've thought about this a lot," he said. "I've talked with Bob about it too, and he agrees with me. He knows what might happen, but . . ."

He shook his head. "Suppose there can't be any more mixed marriage. All the mixed couples who are married already will become oddities — people will whisper and stare whenever Bob and Moyra appear anywhere —"

"I know," Wyn exclaimed. "That always happens when people are . . . different in any way. But what harm can that do them?"

Gerry sighed. "Suppose they go to a dance together. There will be a big group, men and girls, who have drunk too much. There always is. Somebody in this group will see Bob and Moyra and get a great idea. He'll go round behind Bob and Moyra, clowning, and people will

laugh. Even those who don't laugh won't want to interfere. Encouraged, the funny man will go further and further with his clowning, and everyone will be in stitches. Moyra and Bob will ignore him as long as they can. He'll drop a coin down the front of Moyra's dress, and everyone will cheer when it tinkles on the floor. Great fun. He'll tap Bob on the shoulder, and Bob still won't do anything. The funny man will stand on Moyra's dress and it'll tear, and there'll be another cheer, louder this time. After that there's bound to be a fight. Bob and Moyra, being sensible people, still won't start it. They'll make their way quietly off the floor to go home. But someone — probably a girl — will snatch at Moyra's torn dress, and either Bob will hit somebody or somebody will hit Bob. It won't matter which. And Bob and Moyra will be thrown out — always. Never the funny man and his friends."

"But," Wyn objected, "Bob and Moyra don't have to —"

"It won't make any difference what Bob and Moyra do. They'll be *made* to retaliate sooner or later."

"They'll just have to keep away from dances, then, and places where people may do that sort of thing."

Gerry shook his head again. "It won't matter where they go — if this law is passed. Suppose they're in a crowd. They'll be jostled apart — with almost friendly good humor, at first. They'll try to get together again, and as they try to drive a

way through, people will get annoyed at them. They'll be roughed up a bit, just to keep them in their place. Bob will be tripped and get his hand trodden on, and Moyra will get a juicy tomato pushed down her back —"

"It's silly talking like this," said Wyn impatiently. "We're just imagining what *might* happen if something else happens —"

"Oh, sure," said Gerry, grinning wryly. "But everything that ever happens was once something that *might* happen if something else —"

There was a loud crash, and a series of smaller crashes. The band faltered for an instant, then, in the way of all night club bands, blared out louder than ever in an effort to cover up the confusion.

Gerry and Wyn looked across at the balcony opposite. Everyone else was staring in the same direction. A table had crashed over with all its spoons, knives, forks, plates and flowers, which were spread in an unholy mess on the floor.

"Adam Bentley — and Elis!" Wyn exclaimed.

Adam and Elis were facing each other furiously across the overturned table. Elis was screaming something unintelligible. Abruptly she bent down, swept a bottle from the debris on the floor and in the same movement sent it flying at Adam's head. Adam dodged, and the bottle, dropping on a table-top on the lower level, smashed so violently that the band stopped playing.

Adam lunged across the wreckage at Elis and deliberately ripped her gown. Elis screamed, stooped again and hurled another bottle at him. She couldn't miss again at that range. It hit his head, ricocheted and smashed on the floor below.

Elis was grotesque, half overdressed, half naked, and not attractively half naked. She looked like a rather low-class prostitute.

It wasn't surprising that someone said so. But perhaps the opinion needn't have been expressed so loudly, with so much obscenity and profanity, or with the generalization about dirty another adjective Midinans which accompanied it.

Someone else shouted that any Midinan was worth fifty dirty same adjective Faquistans.

To help things on, Adam gave Elis a back-handed swipe that sent her reeling back against the balcony rail, shrieking shrilly.

"Mackenzie!" Gerry exclaimed. It was suddenly very obvious that this was an act, and that Mackenzie was at the back of it. This wasn't like Adam. It wasn't like Elis. As they shrieked and fought and clawed each other they were shockingly repulsive — because the whole scene had been planned to be as repulsive as possible.

But by this time not everybody was watching Adam and Elis. The disturbance was spreading. A scuffle had started on the floor, and a shouted quarrel was being carried on from the two balconies. Bob

Drake jumped as a thrown glass hit him in the back.

Gerry jumped to his feet. "Don't be fools!" he shouted. "Don't you see this is a staged demonstration, and anyone who joins in is simply playing into the hands of —"

He was drowned by a roar as someone threw a bowl of hot soup over Moyra's dress and she jumped up, screaming. Moyra and Bob were in a conspicuous spot, and they were conspicuously a mixed couple. Seeing them involved in a disturbance, people wanted to take Moyra's part or Bob's, or the part of both of them against agitators, or the part of the agitators against them.

A burly man bored in at Bob, head down, and Bob coolly and efficiently kned him in the face. He staggered back, his flailing arms brushing at least a dozen people.

Thereafter it wasn't clear who were the paid mischief-makers, who were trying to restore order, and who had been roused to feelings of racial hate by what had happened already.

Somebody knocked Adam unconscious, and by that time nobody noticed, or cared, that Elis immediately stopped shrieking and bent anxiously over him. Moyra and Bob, inoffensive as they were, became the focal point of the riot. What Gerry had been saying came true almost before he had finished saying it. However, he hadn't been quite right. He and Wyn, helpless, saw that very few people were trying

to attack either Moyra or Bob; everyone wanted to defend one or other of them. The effect was much the same.

A man who reached toward Moyra, with what purpose it was never known, was kidney-punched and sent flying along the polished floor. A girl spat at Bob and was promptly attacked by two other women who tore her hair and scratched her face and shoulders.

No guns were produced and few bottles were used. There was no panic and no blood lust. But heads were broken, faces scratched, clothes torn and legs kicked. Women were mishandled merely under cover of the general disorder.

Even Gerry and Wyn found themselves fighting. Gerry felt bound to strike down a man who attacked a completely unoffending couple at the next table, though he realized perfectly well that even that was likely to involve him and Wyn in trouble. It did. For the next few minutes it was all he could do to keep Wyn safe. Wyn was healthy enough, but neither strong nor tough.

At the end of that time the police arrived. Then things gradually sorted themselves out.

Two men had broken arms, three had crushed ribs, there were half a dozen cases of concussion, and dozens of people had cuts and bruises. There was considerable damage to the club and to the general appearance of the patrons.

But the Spacedive didn't wish to make any charges. Adam, Elis and the other early trouble-makers had all prudently disappeared. The police, unwilling to spoil a good record, weren't keen on making any arrests if they could be avoided. They could. What most people wanted was to get home quietly, without any further trouble. Any who had other ideas changed them when they found the police anything but encouraging.

One couple were stubborn longer than everyone else — Moyra and Bob. It wasn't unnatural, since Bob finished with his shirt torn from his back, his face scratched, his ribs bruised and one ankle badly swollen, and Moyra was left crying more from shock than injury, her clothes in worse state than Elis's had been. They were entitled to make trouble, and had no intention of letting the matter drop.

But they withdrew their protests after a few words from Gerry Young.

Gerry hadn't anticipated Mackenzie's next move, but obviously this was it, and equally obviously there was nothing AMAB could do about it. If he and Wyn said they had seen Mackenzie with Elis and Adam, Mackenzie could either deny it completely or admit it and point out reasonably that that was no proof that there had been any arrangement between them. No, Mackenzie would have covered his tracks.

And Moyra and Bob, by lodging official complaints, would only be

playing into Mackenzie's hands. The more publicity the affair got, the better Mackenzie would be pleased.

"Mackenzie's won that round," Gerry told Wyn afterwards, "and all we can do is make sure we win the next."

"How has he won it?" asked Wyn indignantly.

"See the paper tomorrow."

"Well, even if he has," Wyn declared warmly, "I don't think Mackenzie would give in as easily as you seem to be doing, Gerry. He'd never admit he'd lost a round."

"No. He'd fight longer, harder and much dirtier than I would."

Wyn flushed. "I don't want you to fight dirty. I don't want you to be like Mackenzie. But I don't want you to be beaten by that man, Gerry."

Gerry grinned. Gerry's trouble was that he could always see the other man's point of view.

"I think Mackenzie's sincere enough," he said. "He may not believe particularly in this cause, but he believes in the Realist Party, and it's them we're opposing in this. And to Mackenzie the end always justifies the means."

"You mean," said Wyn incredulously, "you think he was right to fix tonight's affair?"

"Oh no," said Gerry placidly. "All I mean is, this doesn't tell me anything new about Mackenzie. I knew already he'd do anything to get the result he wanted."

The phone rang. Gerry picked it

up. Wyn saw his face stiffen. "Moyra? Again? The filthy swine! As if it wasn't enough to . . . She's not dangerously hurt, I hope? Well, that's something. You couldn't identify any of the men?"

A long pause. Then: "No, I don't believe they could have been paid thugs. Just drunks, inflamed by what happened earlier. That's the worst of demonstrations, they get out of control."

Another long pause. Then Gerry said doubtfully: "I can appreciate that you want to get back at them any way you can, Bob, and AMAB can certainly use some help. Sure, come along first thing tomorrow, and if the picture's all you say . . ."

When he hung up, Wyn asked quickly: "What's happened to Moyra?"

Gerry's brow, which had cleared, darkened again. "Three toughs set on Bob and Moyra as he was taking her home," he said. "Bob wasn't hurt much, but Moyra got a bang on the head and two broken ribs. When she was down they kicked her and injured her internally — she's in the hospital now."

Wyn went white with fury. "I suppose you'll still say there's no reason to get mad at Mackenzie?"

"I'm pretty sure Mackenzie had nothing to do with this. He set something off, that's all."

"I should say he did set something off!" Wyn retorted passionately. "He sets the mob on Moyra and Bob, and they get beaten up —

that makes him responsible, doesn't it, whether he actually planned this attack or not? What's the difference?"

He shrugged.

Gerry started to say something, but Wyn was in full cry now. "We've got to win, Gerry! At first I didn't care, but we can't let this sort of bestiality beat us. I didn't believe what you were saying earlier tonight, but now I do. Think of it — Moyra and Bob having a quiet night out, not harming anybody. And just because Mackenzie wants some political success or other, Moyra and Bob are victimized, attacked, humiliated in front of scores of people. That's bad enough, but the next thing we hear is that Moyra's in hospital, beaten up by three sadists who might have killed her —"

Wyn was nearly hysterical.

"Don't get all worked up, honey," said Gerry quietly. "I know it's bad. I'm not congratulating Mackenzie on his part in it either. All I'm saying is that this is the sort of thing we've been fighting all along. The situation hasn't changed."

"We've got to get a huge majority in this poll, for the sake of Bob and Moyra," Wyn insisted.

"Yes — for the sake of Bob and Moyra," agreed Gerry. But he wasn't thinking along quite the same lines as his wife. He had a longer-term view.

If there wasn't a huge majority for AMAB, what had just happened to Moyra and Bob would be liable to happen any time — because it

would be almost sanctioned by public opinion and the law.

v

Gerry was up first the next morning. He brought in the papers and dumped them on the bed.

Wyn wailed: "You don't love me any more!"

"Not just now," said Gerry grimly. "I've got too much on my mind. Look at those."

Ten minutes later she said: "I don't want to seem dumb, Gerry, but I still don't see what you mean, or what you meant last night when you said the papers would show how Mackenzie had won. They make a lot of the riot last night, but . . ."

"That's it," said Gerry. "Honey, you were there, and the reports are fair enough. That's why you don't quite see the significance, perhaps. But if you hadn't been there and didn't know Mackenzie was behind this, how would it look? Race dissension behind night-club fracas. Mixed couple fight, kindle race riot. Only a spark needed to inflame feelings on AMAB issue. Another mixed couple attacked on way home — girl in the hospital.

"Doesn't look as if all men really are brothers, does it?"

"I see . . ." said Wyn. "And there's more than that. Elis and Adam looked really disgusting — as they were meant to, of course. You felt people of different races shouldn't be allowed to get married, just looking at them fighting."

Gerry nodded soberly. "You'll notice that that point isn't missed in the papers. The description makes it clear that it wasn't a man and woman squabbling, but a Midinan and a Faquistan. I'm not saying the papers are biased, though some of them are, the Realist ones. I must hand it to Mackenzie — the whole tone of the incident was carefully selected and carried through to make it crystal clear that the all-men-are-brothers idea is only skin deep and that if you scratch us we're all ready to go for any member of another race at the drop of a hat."

"What a heel the man is," Wyn murmured venomously. "What a filthy way to win votes!"

Gerry shrugged. That angle was less important to him than it was to Wyn. "Mackenzie isn't much worse than any criminal lawyer," he remarked, "who defends his client by suppression of the truth, downright lying and slinging mud at everybody else in the case, though he knows his client's guilty as hell. What's more important: how do we get back the ground we've lost?"

He was really putting the question seriously to Wyn, for though no one would accuse her of being a great thinker or a smart politician or a competent psychologist, she did have the gift of seeing the right course of action sometimes without knowing how she reached it. She didn't like it to be called feminine intuition, but that was what it was.

"Well, what was this about Bob

Drake coming round first thing this morning? And about a picture?"

Gerry looked at her thoughtfully. "Think there's something in that, do you? I didn't. Bob wants us to launch a one-picture campaign. He's got a picture Moyra posed for, and he thinks we should use it to represent the whole AMAB idea — Moyra, from Greensing, as a symbol of attractive alien womanhood —"

Wyn gave a cry of delight. "That's it, Gerry! Moyra in the picture — fiancée of artist — lying injured in the hospital — beaten up by thugs, obviously Realists. That's great propaganda. When you work up the story —"

"I see what you mean," said Gerry, with sober interest, "but how do we know Bob's picture is going to be suitable?"

"Oh, it will be," said Wyn impatiently, brushing that aside. "This is what you want, Gerry! Tell the story of Bob and Moyra — you know more about them than I do — how they love each other, how they're going to get married, how they were attacked last night. Tie in the picture, how it was painted, how Bob suggested using it . . . Oh, you can do this sort of thing far better than I can."

"Once you've suggested it, yes." Gerry still wasn't too sure. Well, you've been right before, honey, when I thought there wasn't a chance of it. I hope you're right again. Wonder what Bob's picture looks like?"

They didn't have long to wait. Wyn was still thinking of getting up — she spent most of the morning thinking of getting up, and not doing it — when Bob arrived. Wyn got out of bed at last, slipped into a negligee and came through to the lounge after Gerry.

Hand on the door, Gerry paused. "Is that all you're going to put on?" he inquired.

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, I just thought it was hardly fair with Bob's girl in hospital," Gerry murmured.

Wyn put out her tongue at him.

Bob, however, paid no particular attention to Wyn. He was no distracted lover. His manner was brisk and businesslike, despite the bandage on his head. He was more like a salesman than an artist.

"First of all," he said, "you want to see this picture I was telling you about. I know you don't think much of this scheme, Gerry, but —"

"But I do," said Wyn. "Let's see it."

Bob unrolled the sheet he carried. He had worked on paper with poster colors.

"See, Gerry — what did I tell you?" exclaimed Wyn triumphantly.

And as he looked at the painting, Gerry began to get enthusiastic about the campaign Wyn had visualized.

It wasn't just a glamor picture. He had seen much prettier girls, more seductive girls, sexier girls — but he had never seen anyone so

appealing. She reached out of the paper, young, warm, vital . . . and *exotic*. That was what struck Gerry immediately and made his interest mount until he could hardly tear his eyes from the picture. It was exactly what AMAB wanted: a girl who was obviously alien (except to anyone from Greensing), and yet sensationally attractive without appealing to one sex only. A glance at Wyn showed that she approved, too. Moyra — at any rate, Moyra as seen by Bob — was that rare type, the girl who could enchant both men and women.

"Did you mean this for AMAB, Bob?" Wyn asked.

"No, I didn't mean to show it at all. I did it as my own private picture of Moyra. But last night . . ." For the first time he showed anger, a quiet, controlled fury which was the last thing one would expect of an artist. "I saw them kicking Moyra, Gerry. I was clinging to a wall, dizzy, unable to do anything about it, but I could see it all right. Can you imagine it, what it's like to see your girl lying on the ground and men kicking her? Think of someone doing that to Wyn, and you watching and not able to stop it."

"I can imagine," said Gerry quietly.

"Well, this isn't much, but it's all I can do. I thought surely if people knew the story, my picture would help to make them hate the men who —"

"That's just it, Bob," Wyn said. "It must. Everybody has a sentimental streak, and all we have to do is show that and explain how Moyra's lying injured in the hospital —"

"And they'll vote AMAB," concluded Gerry, "though really the appeal to reason in this is very slight, if it exists at all. That's all right — it's an emotional appeal we need, to counteract Mackenzie's coup last night."

"Mackenzie's what?" asked Bob sharply. Gerry had to explain what he knew and guessed about Mackenzie's part in the riot. Bob simmered visibly.

"Then he's the man who's really responsible. I'm going to get back at him somehow, sometime . . ."

"You will," said Gerry, "with this. We'll get the printers on the job right away."

AMAB went to town on the Moyra story and picture. Beautifully reproduced posters went up before evening, headed: "This is the girl the Realists tried to kill!" The picture appeared in all the later editions of the evening papers, and pamphlets were distributed all over the planet.

Almost at once it was clear that the move was as big a success as Wyn had said it would be. The hospital, AMAB headquarters and newspaper offices found the phone bell ringing all day. Everyone wanted to know more about Moyra and Bob, and how Moyra was. Gifts of

money and promises of support poured in.

"It's rather a tragedy," Gerry sighed philosophically, "that such a big, important issue should be settled by propaganda."

Wyn made one of the very occasional remarks which showed that she was capable of analysis. "Did you ever hear of any big, important issue that was settled by anything else?"

It was clear that the Moyra story would have to be followed up. It was easy enough to find the copy; Moyra had had an interesting life, what there was of it. It wasn't so easy to find further pictures to go with it. Bob worked all day and all night, but could produce nothing which wasn't an anticlimax after his glorious personal portrait of Moyra. He had meant it to be the best thing he had ever done, and it was. He couldn't top it.

Moyra had never liked being photographed, and the few pictures of her which existed were unsuitable. Finally Wyn had an idea and Gerry had Moyra photographed in the hospital, sleeping. With it was published Bob's picture again, as a contrast. They were grimly effective.

"I think," said Gerry contentedly, "we've got back all the ground we lost, and a little more."

On hundreds of billboards the face of Moyra Molin continued to gaze out appealingly, a stab in the heart of every man and woman who had ever been guilty of racial dis-

crimination, who had ever refused to believe that all men are brothers. And particularly it was an invitation to think again to those who at any time had preached that marriage to such a delectable creature should be made illegal.

But all the same, Gerry, who was seldom reckless, suggested quietly to Bob when not even Wyn was present: "If I were you, Bob, I'd marry Moyra now, before she leaves hospital, before the ballot."

"You think even now mixed marriage may be made illegal?" Bob asked, surprised.

"I think there's no point in waiting and risking it. Certainly not if you and Moyra are quite decided that you want to be together, whatever happens. Maybe I should be advising the opposite. Because if the Realists win, things are going to be tough for you two — you know that, don't you?"

"I can guess, but — hell, whatever happens Moyra and I have got to be together. You really think . . .?"

"I really think you may lose her, unless you marry her right now."

There was no doubt of the strength of Bob's feeling for Moyra. He paled at the very suggestion. "I'll go down and see Moyra right away," he said. "If she agrees . . ."

She agreed. But the wedding was kept quiet for the moment. A romance is usually better propaganda than a marriage; besides, the admission that Bob and Moyra were rushing into marriage without wait-

ing for the ballot might not do AMAB any good.

VI

The ballot was fixed for the same time all over the galaxy. The AMAB-Realist campaign was going on everywhere, and it seemed to be close. Public-survey polls had been wrong so often that hardly anyone paid any more attention to them now than to weather forecasts. Anyway, they, too, suggested a close contest, for the AMAB-conducted surveys found a tiny AMAB majority and the Realist surveys an equally tiny Realist advantage.

Some commentators forecast a sweeping victory for one side or the other, but that was to be expected. Nobody knew. A wealthy man could have spent all his money on a survey without being able to feel certain that he knew the result. In one world, perhaps. But the multiplicity of worlds and the complexity of motives and environments made it impossible for anyone to calculate the whole problem.

Gerry and Wyn weren't sure. Bob and Moyra weren't sure. MacKenzie wasn't sure.

And most desperately uncertain of all were Elis and Adam Bentley. Like Bob and Moyra, they were already married — in case. But unlike Bob and Moyra, they were not only uneasy, but guilty as well.

Lying on the sun-drenched beach at Farge, on the other side of Eastover, Elis and Adam realized

that some decisions couldn't be made once and then forgotten; they repeated themselves over and over.

They didn't feel guilty, not exactly. It was rather that everything which should have been pleasant had to be weighed in the balance against what they had done, and was usually found wanting. The sun instead of the rain . . . you noticed it and enjoyed it when you reminded yourself of it, but the rest of the day you were thinking of something else. Not having to worry about money for a while . . . all very well, but they had only exchanged one worry for another. Being married at last . . . somehow it wasn't quite what it should have been, with both of them eternally looking back over their shoulders.

They had only once in their lives done anything they had any real cause to regret . . . so far. But they guessed, both of them independently, that it wouldn't be the last. Soon they would need money again, and there would be no honest way to get it.

They were dimly, vaguely, almost unconsciously beginning to understand that they hadn't been, and wouldn't be, very successful in the world because they were on the whole rather worthless people.

From underneath a striped umbrella, beyond which stretched two bare legs at one end and two bare arms at the other, came Elis's voice: "The ballot will settle things for us, Adam."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we'll see what . . . I mean, if AMAB has a terrific majority, then what we did doesn't matter a damn and we can just forget it."

"Yes," Adam agreed. "And if it hasn't?"

Elis was silent. AMAB had to have a big majority before they could feel relieved. For they had been traitors, that was the worst of it. They were a mixed couple, and they had stabbed mixed marriage in the back. Instead of doing what every mixed couple should do, spend their whole lives fighting the prejudice which undoubtedly existed, they had for once turned round and pushed the other way, made things just a little more difficult for every mixed couple in the galaxy.

And every half-caste. That was the other part of it, perhaps the really important part of it. Their own children were going to meet trouble anyway, because they would be neither pure Midinan nor pure Faquistan. Every mixed couple had to face that before they got married.

But every mixed couple didn't have to add to the prejudice against themselves and their own children.

In Jordan the last two demonstrations were being held. There had been meetings, bazaars, balls, fêtes, variety shows and almost every other form of social publicity-cum-fund-raising enterprise. But no matter how many there were, there had to be a last one, for both parties.

By tacit agreement they were held at the same time, in different parts of the city. There were others all over Eastover, of course. But these were the main efforts.

Gerry planned his meeting as pure entertainment. It wouldn't have looked good to make the final AMAB demonstration purely a variety show, but the same effect could be achieved by seizing every excuse for spectacle and entertainment as opposed to more obvious propaganda.

At the beginning a band played music that came from every colonized planet. When everyone was settled, he had a parade — men and women from the thirty main worlds, all in typical home-world costume, and mixed without discrimination but decoratively. That didn't prove anything, but it passed the time pleasantly. Then he had as speaker Malcolm Flint, an ex-Governor who hadn't been noted for his administration but was noted for his wit. Some AMAB propaganda films were shown, slick, well-conceived advertisement of the AMAB idea. Gerry and Wyn themselves did a neat little item, spontaneous-looking but well planned and rehearsed, in which they made the most of their own attractive persons and personalities.

The climax was provided by Bob Drake. He sketched on an easel, and an epidiascope picked up every stroke as he made it and projected it on to the big screen behind him. The device was extraordinarily successful.

With deft, smooth strokes of his pencil he sketched his own life, his meeting with Moyra, their love affair. Then, with a harsher, bolder touch he showed the Spacedive riot. The audience became hushed at the power of the presentation. People and scenes seemed to come alive and move under his fingers; the rapidity, vividness and vitality of the pictorial dramatization left full-color, three-dimensional films far behind.

Bob had the dramatic gift of stimulating, collecting and holding interest so that details and flaws ceased to matter. Earlier, he had introduced his audience to himself and to Moyra, taking time to make himself interesting and Moyra attractive. He had drawn Moyra pert and dashing in smart rain clothes, demure in an afternoon frock, lithe and sleek in a swimsuit, seductive in an evening gown. Now they knew Moyra and could take Bob for granted. He concerned himself with what had happened to them.

"He's great!" Wyn whispered exultantly. "Bob's done far more for AMAB than we have, Gerry."

Gerry nodded and pressed her hand, but didn't take his eyes off the screen which showed the strokes of Bob's flying pencil.

They saw the riot and afterwards the attack on Bob and Moyra. Bob's vivid pencil became positively brutal as it drew three thugs he had never properly seen, Moyra falling, and the men's boots sinking into her

inert body. With his pencil he speared sadism, racial discrimination and the Realists so that a growl of anger came from the audience. He had them with him, no doubt of that.

The only trouble about such a performance was that it had to end some time, and there was inevitably a drop, a reluctant return to normal immediately afterwards.

And in the silence, before the audience had sufficiently recovered themselves to applaud, a clear voice asked:

"May I ask a question?"

Gerry was the chairman, but he had forgotten that fact for the moment. Bob, obviously the person addressed, turned and looked inquiringly at Gerry, waiting for him to say something. The audience, about to burst into thunderous applause, were checked, startled.

The questioner didn't wait for an answer. It seemed a long pause before he spoke again, but it couldn't have been more than a second or two.

"Is it true that you and Moyra were married yesterday?" asked the clear voice.

Again Bob hesitated, looking at Gerry. After all, it wasn't Bob's AMAB campaign, but Gerry's. Apart from the job he had just done, Bob didn't know how Gerry wanted things handled — particularly this question, which had been carefully avoided.

Only one answer was possible,

Gerry decided. They couldn't lie, when it might be proved they were lying. They couldn't refuse to answer, not on the very eve of the poll.

"Yes," he said. "It's true."

At once he plunged into an impromptu effort to nullify any adverse effect of the admission: "As you'll have seen from Bob's story, he and Moyra are very much in love, and when this happened they —"

"Thank you," said the clear voice.

All over the hall people got up to go. Trying to say any more would only make Gerry look ridiculous.

It was another neat Mackenzie job. He had found out somehow about the brief, formal marriage at the hospital, and made full use of the discovery. Seeing that Moyra, Bob and Gerry weren't going to announce it, he waited until it was too late, until it was obvious that they were trying to hide the fact, and then forced them to admit it.

"Is it really important?" Wyn asked on the way home, puzzled at Gerry's unusual despondency.

"I'm afraid it is. If *we* had brought it out at the right moment, it might not have done any harm — only I preferred not to, because I knew it was risky to give any impression that we were scared of the ballot, that we expected to lose it or that we were encouraging mixed couples to get married before it was too late. Trust Mackenzie to find the worst possible moment to drag it out — after we'd almost

denied the marriage, by implication."

Such subtleties were beyond Wyn. "It can't make so much difference, surely," she remarked. "We had a good meeting otherwise, and —"

"What I'm worried about," murmured Gerry, "is Mackenzie's meeting."

When they reached home Gerry phoned the colleague he had sent to the Realist meeting. It had been much as he expected.

There had been no mention of Bob and Moyra until late in the program — Mackenzie hadn't wanted any warning to be phoned to Gerry at the AMAB meeting, probably — but when it came it was extremely effective. Mackenzie himself had reviewed the story of Moyra and Bob, revealed their marriage and made all the points that Gerry had been afraid he'd make.

"I should never have let those two get married," Gerry said regretfully.

Wyn started. "But it was you who suggested it!"

"Yes — in *their* interests. In our interests I should have made sure it didn't happen. Mackenzie would have, if he were me."

"If you were Mackenzie, your wife's first name wouldn't be Wyn."

"But I might be more successful politically."

Wyn shrugged. "Well, if you prefer mere political success to married bliss . . ."

Gerry laughed, with an effort, and tried not to show he was still con-

cerned about the effect Mackenzie's last stroke must have had.

VII

It was a pity, from the AMAB point of view, that there were any newspapers at all on the morning of the ballot. Nothing in them did the AMAB cause any good, and a great deal in them did it a lot of harm.

Before he went to bed Gerry had done what he could, in a statement to the press, to retrieve the Bob-Moyra situation. It wasn't a question of being unsure of the verdict, he declared. Weren't Bob and Moyra entitled to a secret marriage as much as anyone else? What more natural than that Bob should suggest it so that they could go away together immediately Moyra was cleared at the hospital?

But Gerry's copy was poor, weak stuff compared with the case for the Realists, and he knew it.

"Anyway," he told Wyn philosophically, "it's too late to do anything new now. There are rallies, parades and loudspeaker appeals, but they're all fixed. There's nothing much for us to do but wait for the returns."

"How is this planet-unit system going to work?" Wyn asked. Naturally she didn't understand mathematics.

"Each world sends in a ratio, that's all," Gerry explained patiently, not for the first time. "Suppose Greensing has sixty-nine million

votes for AMAB and thirty-three million for the Realists. Greensing sends just 23: 11, and that's integrated with all the other worlds' ratios —"

"Tell me, Gerry," Wyn interrupted. "I've always wondered — how do you integrate things?"

Gerry didn't attempt an explanation of that.

Though there wasn't much they could do any more, they made the expected public appearances, looking confident, friendly and happy. They saw Mackenzie twice, out on the same job, but didn't speak to him. Gerry alone would have done so. It was only on Wyn's account that he avoided an encounter which she would have disliked.

And during the day the issue didn't clarify itself. Sometimes it seemed that everyone was voting Realist, and sometimes it looked as if AMAB was going to have a walkover.

There was no trouble, no more than at any balloting. Nobody was reported hurt, though there was some scuffling here and there. There were no big crowds anywhere, no impromptu demonstrations. As expected, both floral parades were rained off. Gerry had arranged his to be as waterproof as possible, but steady rain was too much for it, and the rain didn't stop all day.

The rain had toned down the whole campaign. Many things which would certainly have been done in a drier city were never possible in

Jordan. Every big event had to be inside. It was no use arranging outdoor shows if people wouldn't go outside to see them. And except for the Spacedive riot there were no fights—steady rain is enough to cool most tempers.

At eight in the evening Mackenzie and the Youngs couldn't avoid a meeting. Gerry was astonished to see how tired and worried Mackenzie looked.

"Only an hour to go," Gerry said kindly.

"And then five hours before the first returns," added Wyn, less kindly.

"You people treat this as a game," exclaimed Mackenzie almost angrily. They both stared at him in surprise.

"I'd have said you were the one who treated it as a game," Gerry observed. "A chess game—one you wanted to win, certainly, but no more than—"

"Don't you understand?" Mackenzie demanded, actually angry for the first time in Gerry's experience of him. "You want to win so that all men will be brothers. You think that if you do, that will make the galaxy wide open, free, without prejudice, happy—by some sort of magic, I suppose. I want to win because the galaxy *isn't* wide open, free, and without prejudice. I want to stop the silly farce of pretending difference of race doesn't matter, when—"

"You're twisted," Wyn flashed at him. "Do you think it isn't obvious what's happened to you?"

You loved a girl of another race once, and she wouldn't have you. She spat in your eye. And now you see a chance to take a queer, perverted revenge on her and everybody like her. You think that since you couldn't have *her*, no mixed couples should ever be allowed to marry—"

Mackenzie swore at her, furiously, bitterly and unprintably.

Wyn seemed to enjoy this. She looked at Gerry expressively, as if to say "See what kind of a man he really is, when you get down to it?"

Mackenzie recovered himself. He ignored Wyn. "I suppose you're going to hit me for saying that to your wife?" he asked Gerry bluntly.

Gerry shook his head. "Not at all," he said. "She was trying to annoy you. She doesn't like you. Incidentally, is what she said true?"

He didn't expect an answer, but he got it.

"Yes," said Mackenzie quietly, fiercely. "Not that I'm trying to take revenge for what happened—that's nonsense. But it's true that once, though I knew it was wrong, though I knew we'd both regret it, I'd have married a girl who—"

"It wasn't wrong," Wyn declared vehemently. "It was right, the only right thing in your life, and you've gone all wrong since."

"I've said more than I meant to say," Mackenzie said in the same quiet, fierce tone, "and, as usually happens when that occurs, I'm already regretting it. Goodnight."

He spun round abruptly and stalked off.

"Wyn," said Gerry mildly, "I'm sorry to have to say this. You acted just now like the very people we're fighting. It's irrationality, prejudice, bias, hatred we're up against and you . . ."

Without warning Wyn burst into tears. Gerry held out for a few seconds, then said he hadn't meant a word of it.

At nine o'clock the period of real tension started — after the poll, when the counting was going on everywhere.

When results began to come in there would be an avalanche, for counting was supposed to take about the same time everywhere and ultraradio was virtually instantaneous.

Gerry and Wyn went to bed and slept. That was another thing they had in common, the ability to sleep anywhere, any time. Wyn remarked sleepily just before she dropped off: "We certainly can't have guilty consciences, Gerry."

Gerry was a little befuddled with sleep too. He murmured vaguely: "I don't feel guilty about anything I've done. Maybe about what I *haven't* done . . ."

After four hours' sleep they were back at AMAB headquarters, waiting. A dozen people stood impatiently in a big, draughty room.

"I've just had a call from the city hall," somebody said. "Eastover won't be one of the first in. One of the boxes was delayed."

First in was Earth. The poll there was biggest, but it was the world most competent to deal rapidly with a ballot. The message read:

EARTH — AMAB 21: REALIST 62.

Gerry shrugged his shoulders. "We knew that — and Earth is out of this, anyway," he observed. "The matter hardly concerns Earth. Let's see what the other worlds have to say."

Everybody else standing about had much the same point of view, and waited eagerly for the next result. Earth was the one world in a special position. For all the other worlds the poll meant something different.

A long screen had been rigged up so that the instant the results came over the ultraradio they appeared in black and white. Simultaneously they were being shown outside, where a crowd was waiting. A faint cheer had greeted the first return, not so much because of the result as because it *was* a result, after hours of waiting, and would soon be followed by others.

Without warning, the next flashed on.

SCARISAC — AMAB 314: REALIST 193.

This time there was a loud cheer outside.

Wyn jumped delightedly, grasping Gerry's arm. "That's great, Gerry!" she exclaimed. "Three to one!"

Gerry didn't correct her mathematics. A wave of relief flooded him.

AMAB wasn't unduly strong on Scarisac, as far as he knew. The vote there might be representative.

"I hope," he murmured, "that Scarisac didn't have a particularly good AMAB campaign, or a particularly bad Realist one."

"Why?" asked Wyn. She didn't shine at drawing such inferences.

"Because if either or both of those things were so, that result may be the only —"

The screen flashed again.

RINAN — AMAB 97: — REALIST 60.

"That's not so good," said Wyn.

"Not so good?" Gerry exclaimed. "It's almost the same ratio, honey! That means —"

Another cheer sounded outside. Gerry spun back to look at the screen.

FAQUISTA — AMAB 163: REALIST 101.

"And so is that!" he shouted, and kissed Wyn in his enthusiasm. "We've won, Wyn!"

Wyn was happy enough, but puzzled. "What do you mean, we've won? That's only the fourth result."

"Yes, but don't you see?" Gerry was almost incoherent in his excitement. "The ratio's the same every time. It'll go on being the same, too. This is one of those fundamental issues on which people have the same views practically everywhere, apparently. It can't be coincidence that all three results, apart from Earth's, have been so similar."

He stopped as another result flashed.

MORNEN — AMAB 82: REALIST 71.
"Maybe not," he said more quietly, a cloud passing over his face.

"What's the matter? We won there too."

"Yes, but not by the same margin. Maybe I spoke too soon. I was beginning to hope that people had made up their minds on this, and reached the same conclusion everywhere. I certainly hadn't expected that. Not until those results —"

The screen lit up again.

METAPUR — AMAB 241: REALIST 153.

The cloud disappeared from Gerry's face and his broad grin came back. "All showing exactly the same thing," he concluded.

Wyn remained puzzled. "I don't see it."

Gerry hadn't expected she would. It would be a long and arduous business making it clear to Wyn that 241:153, 163:101, 97:60 and 314:193 were practically the same thing.

"We needn't have worried about Bob and Moyra," he said, as the cheer outside died away. "There won't be an intermarriage ban. There won't be an increase in racial discrimination. People will continue to marry whoever they like, and when you and I are divorced I'll marry a Metapurian —"

Wyn tried to hack his shins, but missed.

"We might as well go home, honey," said Gerry expansively.

"But we don't know about East-over yet!" Wyn exclaimed.

"I do. We won here too. I don't think there was ever a real contest here at all. Mackenzie and I put up a show, but people just glanced at our acts and then went and voted as they'd intended all along."

"You can't possibly tell . . ." Wyn began, and stopped to look at the screen again.

GREENSING — AMAB 133: REALIST 81.

"You can't possibly tell," Wyn repeated stubbornly, "that they're all going to be like this. We may have lost on some world or other. Maybe here."

The cheers outside had neither grown nor diminished. As each result appeared, the same cheer went up. Most people were as cautious as Wyn, not sure yet of victory or defeat.

But there was suddenly a bigger shout, and Gerry and Wyn turned to see:

EASTOVER — AMAB 407: REALIST 251.

Gerry sighed contentedly. "At least we didn't do worse than anywhere else," he said. "Poor Mackenzie. He never had a chance, with all his maneuvering."

"Poor Mackenzie, indeed!" said Wyn indignantly. "He's the last man in the galaxy I'd feel sorry for. I'll bet he —"

A girl came up and said: "Mr. Mackenzie on the phone, Mr. Young."

Wyn looked surprised. "What can he want?"

"Just to offer polite congratulations," said Gerry. "It's the usual thing. Excuse me."

He hurried to the phone.

"Hullo, Mackenzie," he said. "Well, it looks as if we needn't have bothered chasing votes, either of us, doesn't it?"

"Yes," came Mackenzie's dry voice. "Most unsatisfactory."

Gerry chuckled. "For you, certainly."

"And you. There were two things I hoped of this referendum, Young. The second was that the Realists would win by a small majority."

"The second?" Gerry echoed.

"Exactly. The first was that your party would win by a very large majority indeed."

"Huh?"

"May I come over and see you?"

"Certainly. Bring the explanation of that last remark with you, will you?"

"I will." Mackenzie rang off.

"So he wanted us to win, did he?" Wyn said, when she heard about it. "What's this he's giving us?"

"I don't know, honey," said Gerry. "Let's wait and see, shall we?"

There were good-humored cheers when Mackenzie arrived and was recognized. Nobody hissed or booed, or if anyone did he was drowned out.

Mackenzie stalked into AMAB headquarters as if he owned them. There was nothing unusual in that. That was his way.

However, Wyn couldn't help asking tartly: "Have you ordered your sackcloth and ashes?"

"I'm wearing them," said Mackenzie imperturbably.

Gerry waved him into a private room. As Mackenzie marched inside, Gerry looked doubtfully at Wyn. It would certainly be a more civil, polite interview if Wyn wasn't there. . . .

But Wyn had no intention of not being there. Gerry sighed and followed her in.

"So you wanted us to win," she was saying. "That was nice of you. Why didn't you join the AMAB party?"

"Because that wouldn't have altered the situation," said Mackenzie. "Galactically, I don't exist. I'm only a statistic, and statistics only exist in the plural. Do you mind, Mrs. Young, if I talk to your husband?"

"Go ahead," said Wyn. "There he is. He talks English and everything."

Mackenzie settled himself in the hardest chair he could find. That was characteristic. He looked, no doubt, for the most comfortable chair — and picked the hardest.

"If the Realists had won," he said abruptly, "that would have ended this silly farce that we're living in a free, utopian galaxy, where everyone has an equal opportunity and the color of a man's skin or his exact proportions don't really matter."

"Farce?" murmured Gerry. "Isn't

this . . . farce what's just been proved to be the case?"

Mackenzie stared at him levelly. "Don't you see what the vote means, Young?"

"Yes. There won't be any anti-intermarriage law."

"Oh, that. Yes. But then, there was never much question of such a law, was there?"

Wyn was lost, but suspicious. "What are you up to now?" she demanded.

"Please, Mrs. Young," said Mackenzie, "don't assume that everything I say is a lie, everything I do directed against freedom and decency. I'm telling you I wanted the same things as you — but I didn't assume, like you, that they were true just because I wanted them to be true."

He looked back at Gerry. "There was never likely to be an actual ban on intermarriage," he said. "After all, the political form in the galaxy has always been democracy, and in democracies half the population never really imposes its will on the other half. It seems so sometimes, but on a social question like this there couldn't be a workable law. Not a *law*. That would be like the old Whigs and Tories holding an election, the Whigs winning and forcing all the Tories to become Whigs."

"But the Realists always said —" Wyn began.

"I know what we said. You've got to make the issues clear when you ask the whole population to

decide something. For or against intermarriage — do we ban it? But if we'd won, there wouldn't have been an actual law. Just the poll, the warning. The knowledge that the balance of opinion in the galaxy was against intermarriage — that would have ended the farce."

"You keep talking about a farce," said Gerry. "You haven't explained what you mean yet."

"I shall," said Mackenzie. "Presumably, since I was your opponent, you found out what you could about me. You discovered, I expect, that I was born on Metapur, of Terran parents. That was a lie, a carefully-chosen lie. That was the only respectable origin I *might* have had, looking as I look. The only thing that would be accepted. Actually I'm of Rinan-Greensing-Scarisac-Metapur stock. A quarter-breed. A mongrel, if you prefer it."

"Then it seems even more reasonable," said Gerry, "to expect you to be on our side, not fighting for the Realists."

"That's the mistake which all you people who know nothing about this problem make. The Realists are just that, Young. They see things as they are, not as they'd like them to be. Your people are a mixture of starry-eyed idealists and youngsters like Bob Drake and his Moyra, refusing to see that they're heading for trouble."

"Listen: I lived on Rinan, Greensing and Scarisac with my parents and alone. I had plenty of oppor-

tunity to find out what it was like to be a half-caste, how a half-caste is treated. I'm not unduly sensitive. I'm not easily hurt. But what happened to me made me determined to try to handle the problem politically if I could. To admit the prejudice, not pretend it didn't exist, and work out a basis for working relations between the various races.

"Believe me, people like you aren't merely unqualified to deal with this question — you shouldn't be allowed even to vote on it."

Wyn bristled at that. "I didn't think you could be so narrow and —" she began, but this time it was Gerry who motioned her to be quiet.

"I mean it," said Mackenzie, with more warmth than Gerry would ever have expected of him. "Who knows what being a half-caste is like except a half-caste? It's stronger and deeper than ever the color bar was on Earth. Then it was a case of the same kind of man with a different colored skin. Now every planet forces people who breed on it to adapt, gradually, and by the third generation they're a different species, and they're treated as such."

Gerry pursed his lips. "That's a bit of an exaggeration."

"No it's not. I'm not saying the species differ a lot. They don't — hardly at all sometimes. But they are different species. Though interbreeding will probably always be possible between all the races —

that doesn't make a Rinan the same as a Scarisian.

"And people are aware of this. Not everybody, and not in the same way. You two are pretending not to be aware of it at all."

"Because it isn't so," muttered Wyn.

"Sh," said Gerry gently. "What Mackenzie's saying makes sense. I think we'd better let him go on and make sense some more, if he can."

Mackenzie smiled faintly. "I'm glad, Young," he said. "I thought you'd understand, but I couldn't be sure."

"I believe what I'm told, generally.

"If you're to understand this, you have to believe it. You have to take it on trust, because it can't ever happen to you."

"It's bad, is it?"

"No, it isn't bad, really. Which is partly why you have to take what I say on trust. Because if I brought it down to actual instances and incidents, what happened to me would seem like nothing at all. That girl I told you about — she might have turned me down just as any girl turns down a man she finds she doesn't love after all. But it wasn't like that. None of it was like that. There's a real prejudice, a real hate — the sort of thing that made those thugs follow Drake and Miss Molin, and strike her down and kick her."

"We all knew about that," Gerry said. "We were trying to fight it."

"By pretending it didn't exist. I told you I wanted you to win by

a tremendous majority. Naturally, that was what I *really* wanted. But I knew you wouldn't. You couldn't, because there was this prejudice — there *is* this prejudice, and always will be. It'll get worse . . . it's bound to get worse . . ."

"No!" exclaimed Wyn.

Mackenzie ignored her.

"Can't you see, we must admit the difference, and *control* it. That way lies comparative peace and safety and cooperation between the different groups."

"All men *should* be brothers," Gerry murmured, "but they're not, any more. Is that what you mean?"

Wyn looked from one to the other. "Will someone please tell me," she said distinctly, "who won this poll, AMAB or the Realists?"

Nobody answered her.

VIII

Instead of going home Wyn and Gerry went to a deserted spot that meant a lot to them. It was on a hill overlooking Jordan, and it was lonely and deserted for one excellent reason. There was only one path to it through a marsh, and few people trusted themselves to remember it.

It was where Wyn and Gerry had become engaged.

For once it wasn't raining. There is no friendlier city in the whole galaxy than Jordan when it isn't raining. Gerry and Wyn put down their unnecessary waterproofs, sat on them and clasped each other comfortably.

"Not very long ago," said Wyn, "I said Mackenzie was the last man in the galaxy I'd feel sorry for. I was wrong. He isn't bad, really. I don't understand him, of course, but . . . I think he must have been all right, once."

Gerry stroked her hair gently. "It makes a difference when you know he is vulnerable, after all, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose that's it. You're sorry for anyone who's been hurt, who can be hurt. It's only when they're beyond all feeling, as I thought Mackenzie was . . ."

They were silent for a long time. They didn't have to talk. Being together was enough for them. They had talked more during the AMAB campaign than they'd found it necessary to talk for years. Once, long ago, they'd had to talk, hunting for new, interesting subjects so that the vacuum of silence should never lie between them.

But they had found that silence needn't be a vacuum. There could be so much in it that sometimes speech broke the spell, shattered the golden silence that was one proof of the fact that they belonged together.

They watched the dawn break gently, mistily over the city, the yellow dawn of Eastover. They didn't feel it necessary to say a word about it.

When Wyn spoke, the subject was the same as when they had spoken last. "He's somewhere down

there, alone," she said. "Always alone. Successful, of course. Maybe that's something. But not even successful, this morning."

She turned abruptly to face Gerry, breaking the mood of the last half-hour. "Gerry, I never understood. Can I understand? Can you explain it simply, why Mackenzie isn't satisfied, why you aren't satisfied, what the poll really meant?"

Gerry sighed. "I'll try. Mackenzie, like all half-castes, like Moyra and Bob, like all the people really concerned in this thing, wanted an AMAB majority that would show there was no prejudice, no racial hate. But Mackenzie knew it wouldn't happen. Knew well enough not to be even trying for that, but what he regarded as the second-best thing. A mandate to try to settle the race question rationally, realistically. Admit the prejudice and hate and try to control them. By co-operation, reason, if not trust. Got that?"

"I see the idea. I don't know if it's right, but I see how it could be right."

"Well, you see if the Realists had won the poll, they'd have had the mandate. They could go ahead. But what happened? *We* won it — AMAB won it. By three to two, roughly."

He sighed again. "Funny how I didn't see what that meant. That when Bob and Moyra are with fifty people, thirty won't care about them one way or the other, and twenty will think they should never

have been allowed to marry. Voting AMAB doesn't mean you love every mixed couple, it just means you believe in their right to marry if they want to. And voting Realist means, generally, you're prejudiced against all races— but your own, you don't like mixed marriages, you don't think they should be allowed —”

“I see,” said Wyn. “It's quite clear when you put it that way. Bob and Moyra are going to have a lot of trouble, just as you said, aren't they?”

“And not only Bob and Moyra,” said Gerry.

When they went back to Jordan it was raining again, but it was the light drizzle which, in Jordan, you ignored. Elsewhere you'd have said it was raining, but in Jordan you merely said it was damp.

Jordan was wakening up. The news-bills were flashing, though there were few people about yet to see them.

The *Sketch*, in green lights, said soberly: AMAB WINS GALAXY: REALISTS HOLD EARTH.

The *Mirror*, in red lights, declared more journalistically: REALISTS NIXED. AMAB BEATS THE BAN.

The *Sun* — you never knew whether the *Sun* had its tongue in its cheek or not — said: YOU TOO CAN MARRY A GREENSINGER!

The *Star* tried a paraphrase of the election phrases, not too successfully: ALL MEN CAN BE BROTHERS-IN-LAW.

“You'd think we'd settled something,” said Gerry. “And we haven't. When men started colonizing worlds that were going to make them adapt physically, they started something nobody will ever be able to settle.”

“Then there's no use worrying about it,” said Wyn matter-of-factly. “Let's get home and get some sleep.”

They didn't speak again until they were in their bedroom. Then Wyn spoke hesitantly.

“Gerry — I know I'm not clever, and you and Mackenzie were talking over my head, seeing things I didn't see — and maybe you were right. But you know how I sometimes see things you don't see — like how we could use Bob's picture, and —”

Gerry looked up with interest. “Have you got an idea again, honey?”

“It's about this poll. You and Mackenzie seem to be satisfied that though there was an AMAB majority, the poll shows there's an awful lot of race hate and all the rest of it, and that couples like Bob and Moyra are going to find a lot of dislike and prejudice stacked up against them.”

“That's just it, Wyn.”

She slipped into bed and sat clasping her arms round her knees, frowning with the effort of trying to explain something she just *saw*.

“But don't you see,” she asked, “what's going to happen now? It seems to me that people who voted Realist will see now that most people think differently from them, and

maybe they'd better get in line and not make a nuisance of themselves. I mean, they know they're in the minority. Some of them will think again and decide maybe the AMAB idea is right after all."

Gerry stared at her, wondering if once more she was right when he thought there wasn't a chance.

"I think if they took another vote right now," Wyn went on, "everybody who was AMAB last time would still be AMAB. But a lot of people who were Realist would

be AMAB this time. People don't like to stray from the herd, Gerry. I . . . I know I'm often wrong, I say silly things, but I can *see* this. If we were Realists, and Bob and Moyra came to live next door to us, would we fight with them, knowing most people were on their side? I don't think we would."

"Honey," said Gerry, "I could kiss you."

Wyn's frown of concentration dissolved. "Well, there's only one answer to that," she said.



Coming Next Month

In our next issue, on the stands in early May, we'll joyously celebrate the return to F&SF, after too long an absence, of Damon Knight, whose novelet, *You're Another*, is a wonderful blend of slapstick and solidity, a zany adventure story with a new science fiction twist. In the same issue, Chad Oliver again brings his knowledge of anthropology to bear on the problems of the interplanetary future in *Artifact*, and Old Master P. G. Wodehouse pronounces the definitive word on mad scientists in *A Slice of Life*. There'll also be another in our series of rediscovered stories by Saki, a further tale of Manly Wade Wellman's ballad-singing John, and stories by August Derleth, Evelyn E. Smith and others.

Another F&SF first story, by a young man who works with digital computers but writes of older and stranger things.

Who's Counting?

by RODGER LOWE

WHEN MIKE AND LOIS MOVED IN, they didn't ask the landlord about the other tenants, because the apartment was such a bargain that they didn't want to seem critical.

"Sometimes," Mike said one night, "I wish we had asked about the neighbors. It seems silly, though."

"I know," Lois replied, handing Mike a platter to dry. "Other apartments we've had have been a lot more noisy, but this —" She stopped speaking and Mike stopped wiping as they both heard it.

The sound was faint at first, coming from the foot of the stairs: *tap-thump, tap-thump, tap-thump*.

They stood immobile as the sound slowly crescendoed to a peak at the second-story landing outside their door, then faded in the upstairs direction, was interrupted by the opening and closing of the door to 3A, continued through six repetitions of the *tap-thump* pattern, and stopped.

"Thank heaven, he sat down," Lois sighed, resuming her washing.

"We're just lucky he's an old

man," Mike commented. "Doesn't walk around much up there. Where does this go?" He waved the platter.

"Second shelf, honey. Two weeks here and you still don't know where to put things. Let's find another apartment."

Accepting a handful of wet silverware from his wife, Mike considered the suggestion. "I don't know what to say. This is just right for us. Close to my job, and the rent's ridiculously low. That landlord doesn't know what he could be getting for the place."

"I wonder." Pulling the stopper, Lois mopped up the sink with the dishcloth. "Maybe the last tenants had the same trouble."

Mike shrugged. "We'll probably get used to it." He tossed the towel onto the rack and headed for the living room. "Besides, how could I possibly get the deposit back from the landlord on an excuse like that? Can you hear me saying, 'Mr. Chorney, we want to break our lease because the man upstairs has a wooden leg'?" He grinned ruefully.

As Lois snapped out the kitchen light and joined Mike, it started again, just loud enough to be heard clearly: *tap-thump*, *tap-thump*, *tap-thump*, *tap-thump*.

"Went out to the kitchen," Mike observed, from the easy chair.

"I'll turn on the TV," Lois said.

She waited for the set to warm up, tuned out a syrupy weather announcer warning lovers that tonight's full moon would be obscured by clouds, and selected a mystery show. After adjusting the volume to cover any sounds from above, she joined Mike in the easy chair.

But they had to go to bed sometime.

About eleven thirty — a dull play and two old movies later, to be exact — they retired.

The summer air was warm and humid, and faint, cloud-dimmed moonlight came through the opened windows.

Mike rolled over and took his wife gently in his arms.

"'Night, honey," she breathed, sleepily.

"Goodnight, sweetheart." He terminated the sentence with a kiss, and —

Tap-thump! sounded from overhead.

"Oh, no!" Mike groaned, releasing his wife.

"He's always been in bed by this time," Lois said, stirring uneasily.

Tap-thump, it came again; *tap-*

thump, *tap-thump*, across the floor above, *tap-thump*, *tap-thump*, *TAP*.

A minute passed.

"Maybe he got stuck in a knot-hole." Mike's attempt at humor was interrupted by Lois' urgently whispered "*Shh!*"

And, tensely, they both waited.

Another minute and another. Mike and Lois turned over a time or two, then, afraid the rustle of their movement in the bed might cover the anticipated sound from above, they lay stiffly, staring at the ceiling.

"In God's name, why doesn't he put his foot down?" Lois whispered, so sharply that it could have been a scream.

Mike did not speak.

A distant church bell chimed the hour of twelve.

In the sky, the ragged clouds parted, and the milk-white light of the full moon fell through the windows upon the upturned faces of the two.

Then, they heard it.

Thump. Their tension snapped as though cut by a knife, and as they relaxed, limply —

Thump.

And again — *thump*.

Then, across the upstairs floor, and down the stairs: *tap-thump-thump-thump*, *tap-thump-thump-thump*, *tap-thump-thump-thump*.

Outside their door, they heard the scratch of claws as it fumbled for the knob.

John Novotny, the bright nova of Thorne Smith madness, offers a cautionary tale with a simple moral: Never hire a redheaded secretary unless you intend to take full advantage of all her services.

The Tin Halo

by JOHN NOVOTNY

TIMOTHY WELDON SAT UNCOMFORTABLY on the extreme edge of the bed and frowned at the two straight-backed wooden chairs in the small room.

"I should think," he called, "that the salary I pay you as my secretary would warrant the purchase of one small easy chair."

Dinah's soft low-pitched laugh disengaged itself from the tinkle of glasses and ice cubes and snaked its way out of the kitchen. It broke down Tim's guard and agitated his blood pressure. When he had hired Dinah, her laugh was a rather innocent affair, but it had changed, subtly and irresistibly. It became a mesh, a net of caresses that caused the hair on the back of his neck to itch.

"It deteriorated morally," he stated aloud.

Dinah appeared in the kitchen doorway.

"Who did?"

"Who did what?" Tim asked.

"Deteriorated morally," Dinah

grinned, standing so that one leg was shown to best advantage by the incompletely buttoned housecoat. The leg was golden tan, the housecoat soft white, and burning around her shoulders was Dinah's red hair. Tim looked away.

"No one," he answered. "I was thinking out loud."

"Oh."

Dinah disappeared into the kitchen and Tim studied the chairs again. The memory of the white housecoat blurred his vision and he reached up slowly to undo his black bow tie. Dinah's voice startled him.

"You don't look very comfortable. Why don't you lie down?"

Tim regarded the kitchen doorway suspiciously.

"My shoes would dirty up the bedspread."

"That's simple," the answer sped back. "Take off the shoes."

Silence flooded the small apartment and hung in the air for a full half minute. Then the impatient pop of a bottle cap announced Dinah again.

"Go ahead. Take them off. I'm not going to attack your feet."

When she came out carrying the tray and drinks, Tim was reclining warily on the bed. He was certain the housecoat had lost ground by at least one more button in each direction.

"And open your collar," Dinah commanded. "After dinner, a show, and dancing, we are entitled to a little comfort. I've practically taken off everything."

"So I see," Tim said wryly.

"I was afraid you hadn't noticed," she smiled, leaning forward to hand him his drink.

"To get back to the easy chair question," Tim said hastily. "If your salary isn't —"

"It is," Dinah said. "But I sit down all day typing your letters and answering the phone. All that sitting isn't good. Look."

She pulled the housecoat tightly about her and patted a hip. "See?"

She moved closer to the bed and slapped the soft contour again.

"Just feel that," she complained. Tim worked his way to the opposite side of the bed. Dinah followed him.

"You're spilling the scotch," she said. "Go ahead. Feel that."

Tim poked a tentative forefinger at the area indicated. Hardly denting the white material, he pulled the finger back quickly.

"Horrible," he agreed.

"Well, not too horrible," Dinah protested. "But a girl must be careful."

"So must a man," muttered Tim.

"And that's why there is no easy chair. Move over," Dinah concluded.

She turned out all the lights except one lamp by the radio, tuned in some soft music, and settled back on the bed beside Tim. He started to get up.

"I think I'll have another drink."

"I have the bottle, ice, and soda right here," Dinah purred.

"Thank you," he said weakly. Dinah laughed softly and the web closed in on Tim. He watched her toes working sinuously until the blue fur slippers fell off and tumbled to the floor. They landed with two cushioned, but distinctly sinful, thuds. Tim drank deeply. The scotch raced through him, brushing aside convictions and inhibitions like a flood tide. He turned and appraised the redheaded secretary. Dinah smiled wantonly and the scotch boiled a little as it passed his ears. Slowly she reached up and flicked open another button on the housecoat. Tim fell off the edge of the bed.

"Oh, damn," Dinah sighed. She leaned over and looked down at him. "Come back up here."

Tim shook his head.

"You'll have to button that button first," he said decisively.

"You do it."

"Impossible."

"Try."

"If you wish."

He climbed back onto the bed and tried.

"I'm perspiring," he said, "and that music doesn't help."

"All depends on your point of view," she whispered, stretching wicked arms around his neck. Tim almost surrendered. But visions of the Board of Directors, the office, cool and efficient Dinah at her desk, and the Sunday School he attended when he was ten suddenly flashed before his eyes. He leaned away from Dinah.

"No," he stated. "I will not! I won't do it."

A sound of metal bouncing against wood rang through the room.

"What was that?" he asked.

Dinah leaned back, switched on the bed lamp, and gasped. Tim sat blinking in the light and just above his head floated a neat silver-colored halo.

"What are you staring at?" he asked. Dinah pointed.

"That. The sound must have been when it hit the headboard."

Tim felt the top of his head.

"Higher," Dinah offered.

Tim's waving hand suddenly encountered the halo. He grasped it firmly and pulled. The halo refused to move.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A halo. So help me, Tim, you've sprouted a halo."

"Let's not be ridiculous. Get this contraption off me."

"Listen, cherub," Dinah laughed. "You got it — you get rid of it."

"Has this ever happened before?" Tim demanded.

Dinah's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"I hope you don't think I carry on like this every night of the week," she said.

"I only meant —"

"But if I did, Mr. Weldon, I prefer to think that not too many halos would go walking out of this apartment."

"Dinah —"

"A fine reputation I'd have. Dinah Cantwell, halo manufacturer. Turned down by every cherub this side of the Mississippi. I think I'll have another drink."

"I only wondered if you knew what to do about this thing," Tim muttered, trying to shake it off.

"Just don't tell anyone you got it here," Dinah said airily. She squinted at the level in the scotch bottle. Tim walked to the bureau and stared into the mirror for a long minute.

"This is impossible," he stated.

"You couldn't prove it by me," she grinned.

"Dinah," Tim pleaded. "What can we do? This is partly your fault."

"It is not!" she retorted. "If I had my way you —"

"Very well. If that's your attitude."

"Besides, it looks kind of cute. May I feel it?"

Tim bent forward.

"Feels a little tinny," Dinah murmured. She snapped a fingernail against it and listened to the ring. "Sounds like tin."

"I doubt that they make halos of

tin," Tim answered, feeling insulted. "Perhaps a thin gage steel."

"Too heavy," Dinah countered. "There would probably be a lot of complaints from steel halo owners. Stiff necks. Round shoulders."

"Did you sneak an extra drink out in the kitchen?" Tim asked suspiciously.

"You have a nasty little mind," Dinah announced haughtily. "Whose liquor is it?"

"That's not the question," Tim said, tapping his halo. "This is the important thing. And a drunken redheaded secretary is of no help."

"This is the first time you ever got me drunk, Mr. Weldon," Dinah pointed out, "and I shudder to think how you misused your advantage."

"I did not get you drunk. You got yourself drunk."

"So? You still misused —"

"My God! Do you think of nothing else?" Tim demanded. Dinah glanced at the halo, shrugged, and buttoned her housecoat.

"You have a Directors meeting tomorrow," she said softly.

"What has that got to do with it? Oh-h-h!" Tim sank back onto the bed.

"At least, they'll be afraid to argue with you," Dinah smiled. "You can push the bond issue through."

Aghast, Tim stared at his secretary.

"And you could vote Jenkins out as Treasurer," she continued happily. "You know, I'm sure he's stealing the firm blind."

"Miss Cantwell," Tim said in a calm, much too calm, voice. "If you think I intend to appear tomorrow wearing this thing, you are stark raving mad. Fix me another drink."

"May your drunken secretary have one too?"

"Yes, but keep that affair buttoned up."

"Momentarily, my intentions have changed," Dinah said. "It's only that I'm not sure I can carry on this conversation while sober. I just realized that you're the first halo wearer I've ever seen."

"Fine," Tim snorted. "I'm happy that the importance of this occasion has finally broken through."

"Do you only have good thoughts?" Dinah asked.

"What?"

"You know. The halo — all that. Do you only have good thoughts?"

Tim glared.

"At the moment I have a very bad thought," he growled.

"If you had that thought awhile back, you wouldn't be in this fix now," Dinah howled.

"Not that kind of a bad thought!" Tim roared. He breathed deeply. "This one involves fingers around necks. Mine around — never mind. Dinah dear, the halo is not desirable. What will we do?"

Dinah considered the matter.

"You could try your hat. I hung it in the hall closet."

Tim dashed for the closet and Dinah belatedly remembered why she should have gotten the hat her-

self. Tim stared at the small leather armchair that choked the hall closet. Turning slowly, he stared accusingly at his secretary.

"Feel the material," he chanted sarcastically. "It's bad to sit down so much. No easy chair. Take off your pants —"

"Your shoes," Dinah corrected.

"— your shoes and lie down on the bed."

"That chair belonged to a roommate who left it here for safekeeping," lied Dinah. "I wouldn't think of using it and wearing it out."

"Ha, ha," laughed Tim without humor. "Particularly if there's a bed handy."

He spun around and wrestled the armchair out of the closet. Placing it in the center of the room, he sat down firmly.

"Now what?" he demanded in triumph.

"Your hat," Dinah reminded him softly.

With as much dignity as possible, Tim returned to the closet. He came out with a black homburg, placed it over the halo, and looked in the mirror. The hat had not been designed for such a situation.

"It floats," Dinah said finally in a small voice.

"Obviously."

"There's space between your head and the hat."

"I see!"

"Take it off," Dinah commanded, advancing on him. Tim obediently removed the hat and Dinah grasped

the tin halo firmly, in both hands.

"It won't come off," Tim said.

"But it might move up or down," the girl answered. She pulled down and the halo descended until it rested against Tim's curly hair.

"It does," Dinah breathed. She released the halo and it immediately sprang up to its original position with a twanging noise. Tim grated his teeth and held his ears.

"Never do that again!" he said.

"That was the dirtiest damned trick I've ever known."

"But it works," she insisted, "like it's on an invisible spring. Let's try the hat again."

Tim looked at her closely.

"If you twang my halo once more —" he warned.

"I would prefer having nothing to do with your crumby halo," Dinah said crudely. "It was your idea I should help."

"But no twanging," Tim insisted.

"You make it sound like a dirty word. Put the hat on after I push the thing down."

Tim followed instructions and Dinah stepped back victoriously.

"There," she announced, brushing her hands.

"You consider the matter closed?"

Tim asked incredulously. Dinah nodded happily. Tim closed his eyes.

"Do you realize I am hanging onto this hat for dear life?" Tim continued. "If I let go, it will shoot from my head like a cork out of a pop gun. And it will twang."

"I don't particularly care if it

plays 'Yankee Doodle.' I am fed up with that tin ornament. I wash my hands of that halo," Dinah snapped. "I am going to bed."

"What about me?" Tim asked in anguish.

"I suggest you go to bed too. In the morning, we can tackle it again."

Dinah began unbuttoning the housecoat in a businesslike manner and Tim spun around to face the wall.

"Let me know when I can turn around," he said.

"Anytime," Dinah answered matter-of-factly. Tim turned, then hurriedly faced the wall again.

"Now, let me know when you're wearing your pajamas or nightgown or whatever you wear to bed," he said quietly.

"You look silly holding your hat with both hands," Dinah laughed. Tim let go and the hat headed for the ceiling, the halo vibrating ringingly into place.

When Tim returned from the bathroom, the girl was already in bed. He turned off the small lamp and settled himself in the leather armchair.

In the morning, Tim called the office and let the staff know that neither he nor Dinah would be in today. He also postponed the Directors' meeting. He offered no excuse.

"Do you think a scotch and soda would go well at this time of day?" Dinah asked, her eyes focused slightly over Tim's head.

"No," Tim answered. "Let's get down to business."

"Before breakfast?"

"Yes. I was thinking last night . . . Let me get my hat. Now push down the halo," he ordered. "And don't release it!"

"No twanging," Dinah promised. She pushed the halo down against his head and Tim clapped the hat on. He pulled it down tightly.

"Careful. You won't be able to see."

"It's not going that far," Tim explained. The homburg stopped just above his eyebrows. Slowly he released the brim. It was stuck in place.

"Bravo!" Dinah shouted. Tim laughed.

"Now what?" the girl inquired.

"We're driving up to Westport after breakfast."

"To your mother's?" Dinah asked slowly.

Tim nodded and grabbed the hat as it began to go up. "Whew. I'll have to be careful."

"Why your mother's?"

"She'll know what to do."

"Why not work it out yourself, Tim?"

"Westport, Dinah. Mother knows all the answers. She always has."

"Maybe that's why you've never let her see your redheaded secretary, eh?"

"Dinah, please. I'm sure you two will like each other," Tim pleaded. Dinah shrugged and started the coffee.

The blue convertible circled the gravelled drive and stopped in front of the garages. Dinah began to get out and then considered something.

"Tim," she asked thoughtfully. "Do you think the neckline of this dress plunges too low? I don't want to —"

"Oh my God!" groaned Tim, taking a quick glance. "How come I didn't notice that before?"

"You never look there."

"I should hope not. After all —"

"Can you beat that?" Dinah interrupted happily. "Here's the earring I thought fell on the floor of the car."

"Must you poke around like that?" Tim inquired uneasily, studying the windows of the big house.

"I have to get it out. Would you mind pushing up right here? I've almost got it."

Tim whipped out a handkerchief and dabbed his forehead underneath the tightly fitted homburg.

"Sometimes I wonder why I hired you," he whispered, complying with her request. Dinah twisted toward him angrily.

"You'll have to sit still," Tim said shakily. "We're losing ground. Will you please get that earring?" Tim asked after a moment. "The tip of my finger is perspiring."

Dinah laughed. From the doorway of the house came Tim's mother's voice.

"I like that sound, Timothy. Bring her in. When you're through with whatever you're doing, of course."

"She couldn't see that far," Tim whispered hopefully. "Not without opera glasses."

"Got it," murmured Dinah. "Let's go."

"I don't think I can walk."

He crawled slowly from the car and led Dinah into the house. Mrs. Anthony Weldon stood waiting for them by the big fireplace.

"Mother, this is Dinah Cantwell. Dinah, — my mother."

The women looked at each other.

"You're growing up, Timothy," his mother observed without moving her eyes from the redheaded secretary. "I think this occasion calls for a drink."

Tim gulped incredulously.

"A what?"

"A drink, Timothy."

"But I — I thought we never — never had whisky in this house," Tim stammered.

"Never when you were around, my boy. Those were your formative years. You were growing up."

"But I was here only last year," Tim protested.

"You're wasting time, Timothy. Miss Cantwell and I are thirsty. Over there in the cabinet."

Tim moved across the room in a haze of bewilderment.

"May I help with your earring, Dinah?" Mrs. Weldon asked.

"Thank you, no," Dinah smiled. "It fell off in the car. Tim found it."

"I did not!" he shouted.

"Oh?"

"I did not," Tim repeated in a lower tone. "Dinah found it."

Mrs. Weldon smiled and looked at Dinah. "You can call me Liz."

Tim dropped a bottle which, fortunately, did not break. Dinah's laugh crept around his stomach.

"Thank you, Liz. Would you believe it? Not once since I've known Tim has he ever —"

Tim thrust two glasses between them.

"I am still present, you know," he informed them.

"It's difficult to think otherwise," his mother said. "Must you wear your hat in the house, Tim?"

The shock of the question made Tim miss the fact that, for the first time, his mother had not called him Timothy. Both hands reached up and held the brim.

"I suppose not," he croaked.

"Then remove it," Mrs. Weldon suggested.

"You'd better take a good sip of that drink first, Liz," Dinah offered. "I'll join you."

Tim waited while they drank. As they lowered their glasses, he removed the hat. Beyond one eyebrow moving down slightly, Mrs. Weldon betrayed no surprise.

"Hmmm," she said, lifting the glass again. She looked from Tim to Dinah and back to the halo.

"From your expressions I surmise this thing is real," she murmured.

"It's a halo," Tim offered.

"A tin halo," Dinah emphasized as Tim frowned.

"There's a chance it may be a thin steel," he insisted.

Dinah walked to his side and snapped her nail against the halo.

"Listen to that," Dinah said to Mrs. Weldon. "Tin?"

"I should imagine so," Mrs. Weldon answered. "Of course I haven't listened to any other halos, but it does sound rather tinny."

"But aren't you surprised or shocked?" Tim demanded.

"Well, yes," admitted his mother, glancing toward Dinah. "I don't quite understand how she — well, I mean, how this could happen with Dinah —"

"Mrs. Weldon." Dinah stood indignantly erect. "I assure you that if your son had cooperated in the least; if he had acted at all decently; if he had —"

Dinah's chest rose with each protestation and Tim viewed the deeply cut dress with apprehension. He could feel his halo quivering ominously.

"Obviously the halo is not Dinah's fault," he interrupted hastily. His mother nodded and Dinah subsided. "You might say I achieved it in spite of her."

"If you had only thought twice before acting," Mrs. Weldon complained mildly.

"What do you mean?" Tim asked.

"If you had not acted foolishly," his mother said.

"Do you know what would have happened if I had acted any other way?" Tim demanded.

"You wouldn't have that," Dinah said, pointing.

"Yes," agreed his mother. Tim sat down and glared at the two women.

"I acted as I was brought up to act. I was decent and gentlemanly. All my training as a youth stayed by me strong and steadfast," he orated.

Mrs. Weldon got to her feet slowly.

"Obviously I've been a very poor parent," she said sadly. Tim leaped into the air and stared at her.

"Is this my mother?"

"Tim, don't be melodramatic."

"I could use a drink," Dinah contributed.

"Bless you," Mrs. Weldon smiled, heading for the cabinet. "Are you going to marry Tim?"

"Yes," Dinah answered. Tim covered his eyes and sobbed.

"She is not. And I'll have a drink too."

"Tim," Liz Weldon said suddenly. "It just occurred to me that you are supposed to take over the reins of Weldon Products this fall."

"Yes, mother," Tim said dejectedly. His halo felt very heavy.

"That thing you're wearing won't help a bit. Has the Board seen you yet?"

"No, they haven't," Dinah answered for him. "But I think they should. He could throw the fear of God into Jenkins."

"I absolutely refuse," Tim shouted.

"I can't say I blame you," Mrs. Weldon said drily. "But to run the firm you'll have to be there. Can you suggest anything?"

Tim shook his head and halo.

"He could wear his hat," Dinah said.

"Pulled down tightly over my eyes?" Tim asked sarcastically.

"Let's have lunch," Mrs. Weldon suggested. "Then, over coffee, we can think."

The blue convertible sped back down the Merritt Parkway under the capable direction of the red-headed secretary. Tim huddled sullenly against the opposite door.

"Of all the fool ideas," he muttered, fingering the tender bump on the top of his head. Just above the bump, the tin halo floated quietly, still solidly in place, and only slightly dented on one side.

"Liz certainly swung a mean mallet," Dinah said.

"It was a gavel, and I told both of you it wouldn't work. How long was I out?"

"Only a few minutes. It was nothing to get worked up about," Dinah protested.

"You don't think so? My own mother gets me with a gavel, and when I open my eyes, there is my secretary getting ready to try a hacksaw."

"You said some pretty dirty words," Dinah pointed out.

"You were starting to saw my forehead," Tim said grimly. "How

many drinks did the two of you have while I lay there unconscious?"

"There you go again," Dinah complained. "Always denying people little pleasures."

"Oh-h-h," groaned Tim, sinking back against the seat.

As the big blue car passed beneath the George Washington Bridge, Dinah hummed happily.

"What now?" Tim asked suspiciously.

"Liz said that if I get rid of the halo, I can marry you any time I want," Dinah smiled.

"Oh, she did!"

"Yes, and she'll give us a set of sterling, too. Twelve place settings."

Tim leaned forward.

"Did she suggest how you are to go about this? A larger gavel? A sharper saw?"

Dinah shook her head.

"None of those. This involves logic."

Tim edged back and placed one protecting hand on his halo.

"Is there a time limit on your deal?"

"I hope by Monday morning," Dinah announced.

"Well," Tim relaxed. "I guess mother won't have to buy any silver."

"Oh, she ordered it before we left. I had to pick out the style."

"Now, wait a minute!"

"You'll like it, Tim. Simple but rich looking."

"Wait a minute!"

"Big forks, and the spoons are —"

"Not the silver! What about this logic?"

Dinah laughed softly.

"If at first you don't —"

"Now, wait — !"

Tim held on to the tin halo with both hands as the blue car sped toward Dinah's. It seemed to be bending slightly.

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The Fanvets will hold its fifth anniversary convention on Sunday, April 17th, at Werdermann Hall, 3rd Avenue and East 16th Street, New York City. The list of guest speakers will include Ted Sturgeon, John Campbell, Damon Knight, Ed Emsh and others. Rare SF films will be shown, and there will be a giant auction of rare first editions, autographed copies of SF books, original sf art and other collectors' items. All profits from the auction will go to the Fanvets association to be used for the purchase of sf books for Veterans' hospitals and GI posts throughout the world. For further details write to Ray Van Houten, % Fandom House, PO Box 2331, Paterson 23, N. J.

Imagine

by FREDRIC BROWN

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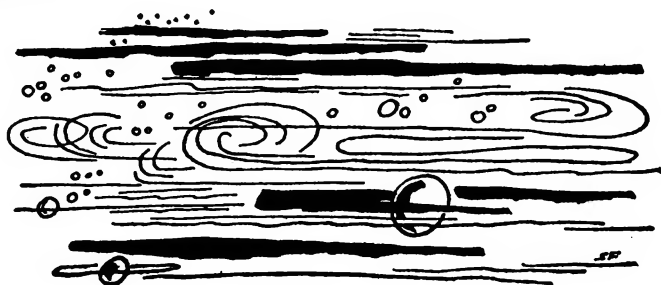
Imagine a piece of matter and yourself inside it, yourself aware, thinking and therefore knowing you exist, able to move that piece of matter that you're in, to make it sleep or wake, make love or walk uphill.

Imagine a universe — infinite or not, as you wish to picture it — with a billion, billion, billion suns in it.

Imagine a blob of mud whirling madly around one of those suns.

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Imagine!



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